

AUGUST STRINDBERG

★

EASTER

THE DANCE OF DEATH

THE GHOST SONATA

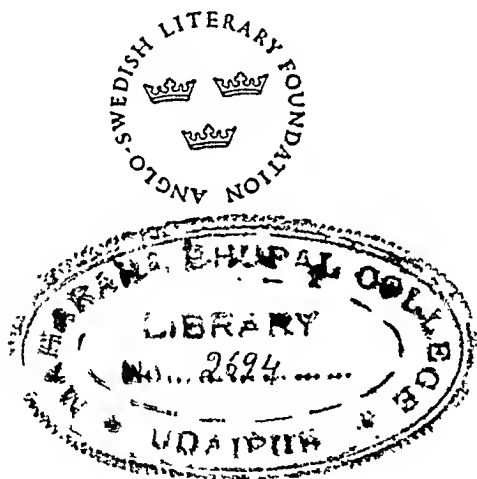
A DREAM PLAY

ANGLO-SWEDISH LITERARY FOUNDATION

AUGUST STRINDBERG

*

EASTER
AND OTHER PLAYS



JONATHAN CAPE
THIRTY BEDFORD SQUARE LONDON

FIRST PUBLISHED MCMXXIX

839-7
378E

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
BUTLER & TANNER LTD
FROME

CONTENTS

FOREWORD	page	3
INTRODUCTION		5
EASTER		13
THE DANCE OF DEATH		81
THE GHOST SONATA		215
A DREAM PLAY		265
		.

FOREWORD

THIS first publication of the Anglo-Swedish Foundation would not be complete without an expression of sincere and deep gratitude to Mr. George Bernard Shaw. To him the creation of the Foundation is due. When in 1926 he was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature by the Swedish Academy he generously offered to give the whole sum, 118,165 Swedish kronor, for the purpose of encouraging cultural intercourse between Sweden and the British Islands and promoting a knowledge and appreciation of the literature and art of Sweden in Great Britain.

To serve this object the Foundation was established under the patronage of His Royal Highness The Crown Prince of Sweden, three trustees being appointed to govern and manage the affairs of the Foundation. The trustees are: The Rt. Hon. Viscount Burnham, President of the Anglo-Swedish Society in London, Admiral H. Lindberg, President of Svensk-Engelska Föreningen in Stockholm, and myself as the representative of Sweden in Great Britain. The Trust Deed was made on the 21st of March, 1927, and the Foundation immediately commenced activities.

The literary work is under the control of an editorial committee with Sir Henry Penson, K.B.E., as Chairman and Professor J. G. Robertson, Director of Scandinavian Studies in the University of London, and Mr. Eskil Sundström as members. The former Swedish Lecturer at the University of London, Miss Asta Kihlborn, acted as Secretary, and was also a member of this committee,

FOREWORD

until her return to Sweden in December, 1927. Every translation is subject to their criticism and approval. Dr. A. Österling of the Swedish Academy and Professor Robertson have kindly consented to act as literary advisers to the Foundation.

The interest taken in Swedish literature and art in England has increased so much in recent years that I feel confident that the particular work which lies before the Foundation will serve a useful purpose in supplementing the publication of Swedish literary works through other channels, and thus form a new permanent link between the peoples of the British Islands and the Swedish nation.

ERIK PALMSTIERNA.

INTRODUCTION

By Professor J. G. ROBERTSON

STRINDBERG at all times regarded himself as, first and foremost, a dramatist; the drama was the form of composition which gave him most satisfaction; and to it he turned, not to the novel, when he had ideas of peculiar force or novelty to embody.¹ His influence upon the European theatre has been very great – how great, it is still too soon to attempt to estimate; for it is of the nature of original genius that its first impact on its contemporaries rarely coincides with its most fruitful and abiding influence on the after-time. In Strindberg's case this influence has been particularly slow to develop into tangible gains; even now, sixteen years after his death, his plays have far from exhausted their potentialities for the theatre; and in some literatures their force is only just beginning to make itself felt. To assist towards a better appreciation of Strindberg's work and its meaning for its time, the Anglo-Swedish Literary Foundation has taken upon itself to place before the English public his dramatic writings in a new translation of which the present volume is the first.

The varied range of Strindberg's plays – there are in all some fifty-five – and their persistent flouting of the *eidola* of the theatre put peculiar difficulties in the way of a survey within the limits of a few pages: they refuse to be classed in accordance with dramatic 'kinds.' The genius of this most subjective of great

¹ Martin Lamm, *Strindbergs dramer*, 2 vols., Stockholm, 1924–26 I, pp. 24ff.

INTRODUCTION

writers is far from showing that regular development which is amenable to normal chronological treatment, and his writings are intricately interwoven with his chequered and tortured life. Ideas and forms of expression recur in a kind of cyclical repetition: 'allt går igen,' 'everything returns again,' to quote a thought, which accompanies like a *leitmotiv* all Strindberg's later work. He wrote romantic and historical dramas in his youth, and to them he returned in his last years; he made, in the eighties of last century, an important contribution to European realism, and he went on writing realistic dramas – albeit tinged with the supernatural – when the first flush of the movement was over. The 'expressionist' dramas that emerged from the great crisis of his life in the nineties, and the 'intimate' playlets of his last period have their forerunners in his earlier years. But one feature is common to them all: Strindberg himself. As in dreams the dreamer is always in the centre of the picture, so Strindberg's dramas, whatever their content or costume, are all slices of his own life – often naked, unassimilated, undisgested, dwelt on with the persistence of a monomaniac, but never without redeeming touches of imaginative greatness and flashes of intuitive genius which throw new light on the relation of man to man.

In 1872, after some initial experiments of obvious literary provenance, Strindberg completed, in its first prose form, his *Master Olof*, one of the finest of modern historical dramas. He was then only twenty-three; at that age, it will be remembered, Ibsen had not advanced far beyond his juvenile *Catiline*. With *Master Olof* and

INTRODUCTION

the satiric novel, *The Red Room* (1879), Strindberg stepped into the forefront of Swedish literature. Other historical dramas followed, *The Secret of the Guild* (1875), *Sir Bengt's Wife* (1882), the latter reflecting – and strange to say, in view of his later antagonism, sympathetically reflecting – the new plea for the individual rights of women then being urged by Björnson and Ibsen in Norway. And in 1881 he produced his *Lucky Peter's Travels*, a fantastic and attractive mingling of satire and fairy-tale – of Dickens' *Christmas Stories*, Hans Christian Andersen and *Peer Gynt*.

These plays represent the first stage of Strindberg's dramatic work. They were followed by a brief pause in which he won high fame as a novelist, notably with the splendid tales of *Swedish Fates* (1883, 1891) and *Realised Utopias* (1885), and published two volumes of verse (1883, 1884) of distinctive charm. When he returned to the drama, it was to descend into the dust of the arena. A convert to the new realism which had spread from France, and to which he had paid tribute with his bitter and outspoken attack on marriage in the stories and sketches of *Married* (1884), he wrote his two famous plays, *The Father* (1887) and *Lady Julia* (1888), the latter with an important prefacc. In our time, when uncompromising realism is a turned page, it would be idle to claim that these forty-year-old tragedies have any longer a very vital message; but with their originality of form, the sharpness of their dramatic portraiture and their pregnant dialogue, they were doughty deeds in the battle for the new faith. They initiated a new type of tragedy which,

INTRODUCTION

in its emphasis of the unmeaningly cruel and repugnant in human relations, discarded – or believed it had discarded – the old Aristotelian conception of tragedy dominated by an ethically purging intention. But just this defiance of tradition, whether it justified itself or not, gave these plays their force as a liberating influence on the theatre. *The Father* and *Lady Julia* were followed by other realistic dramas on similar lines, such as *Comrades* (1888) and *Creditors* (1890); and, as time went on, the type gradually merged into the 'Kammarspel' or 'little theatre plays' of Strindberg's last period. After this realistic outburst, Strindberg's wayward genius again swung back to the novel, this time to rise to the masterpieces of *The People of Hemsö* (1887) and *In the Outer Skerries* (1890), books which display the most winning and harmonious side of his art. Here the pathological violence of the realistic tragedies is, if not absent, at least relegated to a veiled background.

The early nineties were very dark years in Strindberg's life, years in which he passed through a veritable Valley of the Shadow: matrimonial misery, poverty, religious doubts and terrible mental crises, leading ultimately to acute persecution-mania; and all these and other woes are set forth in volumes of autobiography ranging from *The Son of a Bondswoman* (1893), and *A Peol's Defence* (1895), through *Inferno* (1898) and *Legends* (1899), to the comparative peace and calm of *Alone* (1903), books which in the frankness of their revelation have not their like in literature. On Strindberg's dramatic work the 'Inferno' crisis left an indelible mark, its immediate precipitate being the mystic drama in

INTRODUCTION

three parts, *To Damascus* (1899-1904). Here he looks back in allegorical generalization on the sufferings he had undergone; he is himself the 'Unknown,' this Ahasuerus who is driven to despair and madness by adversity and disillusionment, ultimately to creep to the Cross and seek peace for his lacerated soul in a cloister. From *To Damascus* springs, more than from any other single work, the new 'expressionist' drama of Northern Europe. *Advent* (1899) is another, if less direct, confession-play of the crisis, and together with it was published - a little incongruously - a 'well-made' drama of modern Paris life, *Crimes and Crimes*, one of Strindberg's few compromises with the conventional theatre of his time.

It was a more hopeful sign of recovery when Strindberg picked up again the thread of the historical drama which he had dropped since *Sir Bengt's Wife*. Between 1899 and 1908 he produced, with extraordinary industry, a long series of dramas from Swedish history. Although of unequal value, none of these dramas is without high points, and all contain striking dramatic portraits and effective scenes. Finest of the series is undoubtedly *Gustav Vasa*, a great play, and with *Master Olof*, Strindberg's most satisfying historical work. That these dramas are acceptable interpretations of Swedish history one would not venture to claim; and indeed, no great dramatist has abused the privilege of poets to look at the past through their own temperament more capriciously than he. He took a kind of pleasure, too, in running tilt against his nation's prejudices: in *Gustav Adolf*, and still more in *Karl XII*, the latter monarch

INTRODUCTION

being his particular aversion among the rulers of Sweden. But notwithstanding this, and the fact that all these dramas are clouded by the aftermath of his 'Inferno,' they have been too little appreciated outside Sweden. Should the historical drama, as a literary form, ever again come into favour in Europe, they will certainly have some share in its revival.

And in this prolific period of his literary life Strindberg returned again to the drama of realism, although a realism now charged with a kind of electric mysticism. This is to be seen in his *Midsummer* and *Easter* (1901), the latter a drama of haunting beauty, even if its theme be trivial and its ending conventional. And in the double tragedy *The Dance of Death* (1901) he has produced the most unforgettable – if the most hopeless and depressing – of all his tragedies of married misery. *The Dance of Death* is one of the high achievements of the European theatre at the turn of the century.

Still another interesting group of plays of this time are the dramatic cameos – for they are all short – in which he gave effect to the demands for an intricate dramatic art voiced in the preface to *Lady Julia*. These plays found their appropriate frame in Strindberg's own *théâtre intime* in Stockholm. None of them is more fascinating and original than *The Ghost Sonata* whose personages play out their strange fates before us as in a disordered dream. From these 'Kammarspel,' again, has gone out a new and fruitful movement in the theatre of to-day.

In his last period Strindberg also returned to the fairy-play with which he had first experimented in

INTRODUCTION

Lucky Peter's Journey; but the naïve Andersen realism of that play has now given place to the illusive mysticism of Maeterlinck, and Strindberg's imagination soars into a tenuous atmosphere of symbolic poetry where the reader, attuned to his robust realism, sometimes finds it difficult to breathe. To this group belong *Swanwhite*, *The Crown Bride*, which is popular in Sweden, and *A Dream Play*, all published in 1902. The last-named is by many of Strindberg's critics ranged with his greatest works, and regarded as a starting-point for a new *genre* of symbolic drama. And this group was followed in the last years by other unrealistic dramas, to culminate in the final confession of *The Great Highway* (1909). Is it too much to read between the lines of these plays that a kindlier attitude to life was gradually asserting itself in Strindberg's latter years? – that this old Berserk, this Ishmael whose hand was against every man and every man's hand against him, was finding his way with the help of the Catholic faith to a more conciliatory outlook on humanity? The end, alas! was no real peace – not even a Damaseus; only the grim solitude of the Blue Tower in the Drottningsgatan, and the Swedenborgian communings of the *Blue Book*. But on the cross that marks Strindberg's grave are inscribed, by his own wish, the words 'Ave Crux, spes unica.'

Strindberg was, indeed, a strange, complex personality; no other modern writer fills us with such irritation, resentment, repugnance; and yet holds us so irresistibly in his grip. He was an ego-centric in the highest degree, a man of barbaric self-assertion, a moral anarchist; and yet at the same time a creative poet of

INTRODUCTION

world-compelling imagination. The last fifty years have seen none more gifted; none who has put a deeper stamp on the movement of European letters than he. His genius was perverted by the misfortunes of birth and upbringing; he was helplessly at the mercy of passions – *of hate as of love – over which he had no control.* He found in life no sympathy, no permanent friends, no love of the kind that could resolve his distraught complexes into harmony. All his efforts to win for his fellows new truths, a higher and freer conception of life, new beauty – for Strindberg *had* great positive faiths – were frustrated, as he believed, by sinister Powers intent on avenging on the children of men the sins of their fathers. Crushed and broken, despairing, mad, is it to be wondered at that his life is strewn with unforgivable sins against the Holy Ghost?

EASTER

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

★

Written 1901

Translated by

E. CLASSEN

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

MRS. HEYST.

ELIS, her son, a university graduate, teacher.

ELEONORA, her daughter.

KRISTINA, Elis's fiancée.

BENJAMIN, a pupil at the Grammar School.

LINDEKVIST.

SCENE FOR ALL ACTS

The entire foreground consists of a glass verandah on the ground floor, furnished as a living-room. In the centre a large door into the garden, which has a fence and a gate into the street. Across the street which, like the house, is on a height, is visible a low fence round a garden sloping down to the town. The background represents the spring green of the tree-tops in this garden. Beyond are seen a church tower and the imposing gable of a house.

The glass windows of the verandah, which extends right across the stage, are provided with curtains of light yellow, flowery cretonne, which can be drawn. A mirror hangs on a window-post to the left of the door, below the mirror is a calendar.

To the right of the door in the background is a large writing-table, with books, writing-materials and telephone. To the left of the door, a dining-table, a sideboard and a stove with mica panes in the doors. In the right foreground a sewing-table with a lamp upon it. Beside it two arm-chairs. Another lamp is suspended from the ceiling.

Outside in the street is a lamp-post with an incandescent gas light.

In the left wall of the verandah a door leading to the apartments; to the right a door to the kitchen.

TIME: The Present Day (1901)

ACT I

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Musical Prelude.

Haydn. 'Sieben Worte des Erlösers.'

Introduction. Maestoso Adagio.

A sunbeam falls across the room from the left and falls on one of the chairs by the sewing-table. KRISTINA sits in the other chair, out of the sun, and threads a tape through a pair of freshly ironed short white curtains.

ELIS *enters in an unbuttoned winter overcoat, carrying a large bundle of documents, which he lays down on the writing-table. He then takes off his overcoat and hangs it up on the left.*

ELIS. Good afternoon, my dear!

KRISTINA. Good afternoon, Elis!

ELIS *(looking round)*. Double windows removed, floor scrubbed, clean curtains . . . yes, it's spring again! And they have hacked up the ice on the street and the sallow is out down by the river . . . yes, it's spring. . . . And I can put away my winter coat . . . you know, it's as heavy – *(he weighs the coat in his hand)* – as if it had soaked up all the worries of the winter, the sweat of anguish, and the dust of the school. Ah! . . .

KRISTINA. And now you've got your holidays!

ELIS. The Easter holidays! Five glorious days to live, to breathe, to forget! *(Gives his hand to KRISTINA and then sits down in the arm-chair.)* Look! The sun's back . . . it went away in November. I remember the

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

day it slanted behind the brewery across the street. Oh, what a winter! what a long winter!

KRISTINA (*indicating the kitchen door*). Hush! hush! hush!

ELIS. I will be quiet and rejoice that it's all over. . . . Oh! blessed sun! . . . (*he rubs his hands and pretends he is under a shower-bath*) . . . I want to bathe in sunshine; wash myself in light after all this filthy darkness. . . .

KRISTINA. Sh! Sh!

ELIS. Do you know, I believe peace is returning and misfortune is tired of persecuting us. . . .

KRISTINA. What makes you think so?

ELIS. Well, one reason is that as I passed the cathedral just now, a white dove came flying down on the pavement and dropped right at my feet a twig which it was carrying in its beak.

KRISTINA. You saw what sort of a twig it was, did you?

ELIS. It couldn't possibly be olive, but I think it was a symbol of peace, and now I feel bliss, sunshine, peace. . . . Where's mother?

KRISTINA (*points to the kitchen*). In the kitchen!

ELIS (*quietly, closing his eyes*). I hear it's spring! I hear the double windows are out — do you know how I can hear it? By the cart-wheels in the first place; listen! A warbling bullfinch. You can hear the men hammering in the shipyard and there's a smell of paint from the steamers, from the red lead.

KRISTINA. Does it carry so far?

ELIS. Of course it does, . . . yes, we are *here*, but I was up *there* in the North, where our home is. . . . Why

E A S T E R

did we ever come to this awful town, where everybody hates everybody else and you always feel lonely? Of course it was bread and butter which made us come. . . . But misfortune lay in wait: father's crime and little Eleonora's illness;—tell me, has mother been allowed to visit father in prison? Do you know?

KRISTINA. I believe she was there this very day!

ELIS. What did she say?

KRISTINA. Nothing at all; she spoke of other things!

ELIS. But at least we've gained one thing: when he was found guilty there came certainty, and a strange peace when the papers stopped their reports. One year has gone; in another year he will be out, and then we will start all over again.

KRISTINA. I admire your patience in suffering. }

ELIS. Don't! Don't admire anything I do; I am full of faults! Now you know! If only you would believe me!

KRISTINA. But you don't suffer for your own faults, you suffer for those of other people!

ELIS. What are you making?

KRISTINA. Kitchen curtains, dear!

ELIS. They look like a bridal veil. . . . This autumn Kristina, you will be my bride, won't you?

KRISTINA. Yes, but let's plan for the summer first!

ELIS. Yes, the summer! (*Takes out his cheque book.*) I already have the money in the bank, you know! And when term is over we will set out north for our own country—to Lake Mälär. The cottage is waiting for us there exactly as it was in our childhood; the limes are there, the punt floats under the willows. If only it

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

were summer and I could bathe in the lake! This family disgrace has besmirched me, body and soul. I long for a lake to wash myself in.

KRISTINA. Have you heard from Eleonora?

ELIS. Yes, poor thing, she is restless and keeps writing such heart-rending letters. Of course, she wants to get out and come home, but the asylum doctor dare not let her go, because she does things which may lead to prison. Do you know, I sometimes feel remorse, most terrible remorse, because I agreed to send her there.

KRISTINA. My dear, you blame yourself for everything, but it was a blessing that she was properly taken care of, poor soul.

ELIS. Yes, that's true, and it seems to me we are more peaceful as we are. Yes, she is as well off as she can be! When I think how she went about darkening *every little joy, how her fate lay heavy upon us like a nightmare*, torturing us to despair, I am selfish enough to feel a relief which is almost happiness. And the worst misfortune I can imagine would be to see her enter through that door. Such a wretch am I!

KRISTINA. So human are you!

ELIS. All the same . . . I suffer, I suffer at the thought of her misery – and father's!

KRISTINA. Some people seem born to suffer!

ELIS. You poor dear, to come into such a family, doomed from the beginning – and damned!

KRISTINA. Elis! you can't know whether this is an affliction sent to try us, or a punishment!

ELIS. I don't know what it is for you, for surely if ever anybody was guiltless, it is you!

E A S T E R

KRISTINA. Tears in the morning, rejoicing in the evening! Elis, perhaps I can help you through. . . .

ELIS. Do you know if mother has a white tie?

KRISTINA (*uneasily*). Are you going out?

ELIS. I'm going out to dinner. Peter had his doctoral disputation yesterday, you know, and he is giving a dinner to-day!

KRISTINA. Do you want to go?

ELIS. You mean I oughtn't to, because he has shown himself a rather ungrateful pupil.

KRISTINA. I don't deny that his disloyalty upset me; after promising to quote your dissertation, he stole from it without giving the source.

ELIS. Oh, that happens so often, and I am glad in my heart to think to myself 'that's my work'!

KRISTINA. Has he invited you?

ELIS. By Jove, he hasn't! That's really odd, for he has been talking about that dinner for years, as if it was taken for granted that I should be there, and I have been talking about it to others. If I am not invited it will be a public affront. Never mind, it won't be the first; or the last!

(*Pause.*)

KRISTINA. Benjamin is late! Do you think he will pass his written exam?

ELIS. I certainly hope so, with honours in Latin!

KRISTINA. He is a good boy, Benjamin.

ELIS. Remarkably so, but he broods sometimes. You know, of course, why he is living with us?

KRISTINA. Is it because . . .

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

ELIS. Because . . . my father misappropriated trustee funds belonging to him, and to many others. You see, Kristina, that is the terrible thing about it; I have to see these fatherless children whom he robbed, in school, suffering the humiliation of being charity pupils. And you can imagine how they look at me. It is only by constantly thinking of them that I can forgive their cruelty.

KRISTINA. I believe your father is perhaps better off than you.

ELIS. Perhaps.

KRISTINA. Elis, we must think of the summer and not of the past.

ELIS. Yes, the summer. — Do you know, last night I woke up and heard students' voices. They were singing: 'Yes, I'm coming! . . . Happy winds, I bid you greet the birds and countryside and say I love them; tell to birch and lime and lake and hill that I again would see them,—see them as in my childhood's hours.' (*Gets up excitedly.*) Shall I really see them again, shall I ever escape from this awful town, from Ebal, the mount of curses, and behold again Mount Gerizim. (*Sits down by the door.*)

KRISTINA. Yes, yes, indeed you will!

ELIS. But do you think I shall see *my* birches and limes as I used to see them? Don't you think the same black veil will cover them as has covered all nature and life here ever since that day. . . . (*Points at the arm-chair, now in the shadow.*) Look, now the sun has gone!

KRISTINA. But it will come back, to stay longer!

E A S T E R

ELIS. True. The days are lengthening and the shadows shortening.

KRISTINA. We go towards the light, Elis. Believe me.

ELIS. Sometimes I think so, and when I think of the past and compare it with the present, I am happy. You see, last year you were not sitting there, for you had left me and broken off our engagement! Do you know, that was the darkest hour of all. I literally died, bit by bit; but when you came back . . . I lived again. Do you remember why you went away?

KRISTINA. No, I don't, and it seems to me now as if there had been no reason. I simply heard a voice within me telling me to go; and so I went, as if I were in sleep. When I saw you again I awoke and was happy!

ELIS. And now we will never part again, for if you were to leave me now I should die in real earnest! There's mother! Don't say anything, leave her alone in her imaginary world, where she believes that father is a martyr and all his victims are rogues.

MRS. HEYST (*enters from the kitchen in an apron, peeling an apple. She speaks in a kind, somewhat artless way*). Good afternoon, children! Would you like the apple soup hot or cold?

ELIS. Cold, Mother dear.

MRS. HEYST. That's right, my boy, you always know what you want, and say it; and that's more than Kristina can do. Elis got it from his father; he always knew what he wanted and what he was doing, and that's just what people can't stand, and that's why things went wrong with him. But his day will come and then people will

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

admit him to have been right and the others wrong. . . . Now, what was I going to say? I know! Have you heard that Lindkvist has come to town? Lindkvist, the greatest rogue of them all!

ELIS (*rises, excitedly*). Has he come here?

MRS. HEYST. Yes, he is living across the road, a little further down.

ELIS. Then we shall see him pass every day. And that too!

MRS. HEYST. Only let me talk to him once and he will never show his face again, for I know his little ways! . . . Well, Elis, how has Peter got on?

ELIS. I think he's done all right!

MRS. HEYST. I thought so. When are you taking your doctor's degree?

ELIS. When I can afford it, Mother!

MRS. HEYST. 'When I can afford it!' That's no real answer! . . . And what about Benjamin, has he passed his examination?

ELIS. We don't know yet, but he will be here in a moment!

MRS. HEYST. Well, well, I don't quite like Benjamin; he goes about giving himself airs as if he had a right to be here, . . . but we'll cure him of that, no doubt! A nice boy, anyhow. And I forgot, Elis, there is a parcel for you. (*Goes out by the kitchen door and returns immediately with a parcel.*)

ELIS. Curious how mother knows and keeps in touch with everything. I sometimes think she is not so simple as she pretends.

MRS. HEYST. Here's the parcel! Lina took it in!

EASTER

ELIS. A present! I'm afraid of presents ever since I once received a box of cobbles.

MRS. HEYST. Now I'm going in to the kitchen again! - Isn't it too cold with the door open?

ELIS. Not a bit, Mother.

MRS. HEYST. Elis, you mustn't hang your overcoat there, it looks so untidy! . . . Well, Kristina, will my curtains be ready soon?

KRISTINA. In a few minutes, Mother!

MRS. HEYST. That Peter fellow, I rather like him, I must say, he is a favourite of mine. . . . Aren't you going to the dinner, Elis?

ELIS. Of course . . . I think I shall.

MRS. HEYST. Then why do you say you want the apple soup cold, if you are going out. I never quite know where I am with you, Elis. But I do with Peter! . . . Shut the doors when it gets chilly, you mustn't catch cold! (*Goes out to the right.*)

ELIS. The dear old lady! And always Peter. . . . Is she trying to tease you about Peter?

KRISTINA. Me?

ELIS. You know what old ladies are, all whims and fancies!

KRISTINA. What was the present you got?

ELIS (*tears open the parcel*). A Lenten birch! . . .

KRISTINA. From whom?

ELIS. It doesn't say! . . . Well, that's quite harmless, I will put it in water and it will blossom like Aaron's rod! 'Birch . . . as in my childhood's hours' . . . And now Lindkvist has come.

KRISTINA. Why do you mind that?

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

ELIS. He's our biggest creditor.

KRISTINA. But surely you don't owe him anything.

ELIS. Yes, *we* do, each for all, and all for each. The family name is disgraced so long as a debt remains.

KRISTINA. Change your name!

ELIS. Kristina!

KRISTINA (*puts away her work, which is now finished*). Thanks, Elis! I only wanted to test you!

ELIS. But you mustn't tempt me! . . . Lindkvist is a poor man and needs what is his. . . . Wherever father passed it was like a battlefield with the dead and wounded . . . and yet mother thinks of him as a victim! . . . Would you like to go out for a walk?

KRISTINA. And find the sun? I should love to!

ELIS. Can you understand that the Redeemer suffered for our sins, and yet we must go on paying. Nobody pays for me!

KRISTINA. But if anybody paid for you, would you understand?

ELIS. Yes, then I should understand! . . . Hush! there's Benjamin. Can you see if he looks pleased?

KRISTINA (*looks out through the door in the background*). He is walking very slowly . . . and now he has stopped at the fountain . . . and is bathing his eyes. . . .

ELIS. That too!

KRISTINA. Wait a while. . . .

ELIS. Tears, tears!

KRISTINA. Patience!

(BENJAMIN *enters, friendly, respectful, but depressed. He carries some books and a portfolio.*)

E A S T E R

ELIS. Well, how did you do in Latin?

BENJAMIN. Badly!

ELIS. Let me see what you have written! What have you done?

BENJAMIN. I used 'ut' with the indicative, though I knew it ought to be the subjunctive.

ELIS. Then you are done for! But how could you?

BENJAMIN (*humbly*). I can't explain it. I knew what it ought to be; I wanted to write the correct thing and wrote the wrong one! (*Sits down depressed at the dinner table.*)

ELIS (*sits at the writing-desk and reads papers from BENJAMIN'S portfolio*). Yes, it is the indicative! Good heavens!

KRISTINA (*with an effort*). Well, better luck next time. Life is long – so terribly long!

BENJAMIN. Yes, it is!

ELIS (*sadly, but without bitterness*). And that everything should happen at once! – And you were my best pupil; so what can I expect of the others? – My reputation as a teacher will be lost; I shall get no private lessons, and then . . . everything will go to pieces! (*To BENJAMIN.*) Don't take it so badly . . . it's not your fault! . . .

KRISTINA (*with a supreme effort*). Courage, Elis! For Heaven's sake, courage!

ELIS. Where shall I find it?

KRISTINA. Where you found it before!

ELIS. Things are not the same now! I seem to have fallen from grace!

KRISTINA. It is a sign of grace to suffer though inno-

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

cent. . . . Don't let yourself be tempted to impatience.
. . . Stand the test, for it is only a test, I feel it is. . . .

ELIS. Can a year be less than 365 days for Benjamin?

KRISTINA. Yes, a happy mind shortens time!

ELIS (*smiles*). Blow on the sore and it will heal, as they tell children!

KRISTINA. Be a child, then, and listen to me. . . .
Think of mother . . . how she can bear everything!

ELIS. Give me your hand, I am sinking! (KRISTINA gives him her hand.)

ELIS. Your hand is trembling. . . .

KRISTINA. No, not that I know of. . . .

ELIS. You are not the strong woman you pretend to be. . . .

KRISTINA. I feel no weakness. . . .

ELIS. Then why can you lend me no strength?

KRISTINA. I have none to spare!

ELIS (*looks out of the window*). Look who is coming there?

KRISTINA (*looks out of the window and falls on her knees, crushed*). This is too much!

ELIS. The creditor, he who can take our furniture whenever he likes - Lindkvist, who has moved here to sit like a spider in the middle of his web and watch the flies. . . .

KRISTINA. Run away!

ELIS (*rising*). No, not that! Just now as you grew weak, I grew strong . . . now he is coming up the street . . . and has already cast his evil eyes on his prey. . . .

KRISTINA. Keep out of the way, anyhow!

E A S T E R

ELIS. No, now he amuses me . . . he seems to gloat as if he saw his prey in the trap. Come on! . . . he counts the steps to the gate and the open door has shown him that we are at home. . . . Now he has met someone and stops to talk. . . . He is talking about us, for he looks this way. . . .

KRISTINA. If only mother doesn't happen to meet him and make an enemy of him by her rash words. . . . Do prevent that, Elis!

ELIS. Now he is shaking his stick, as if he were vowing that in this case mercy must not go before justice! . . . He unbuttons his overcoat to show that his clothes at any rate have not been stripped from his back. . . . I can see by his lips what he's saying. . . . What shall I answer? . . . 'Sir, you are right; take everything; it belongs to you'! . . .

KRISTINA. Yes, that's just what you must say.

ELIS. Now he is laughing! But in a kindly way, not in bad part! Perhaps he's not so bad, though he does want his money! . . . If only he would come in now and stop that blessed talk . . . now the stick swings again. . . . They always have sticks, these people with unpaid claims . . . and leather galoshes which go 'swish, swish,' just like a cane through the air. . . . (*Lays KRISTINA's hand on his heart.*) Do you feel how my heart beats? . . . I can hear it myself like the throb of an ocean liner in my right ear. . . . Now, thank God, he is saying good-bye! . . . listen, there go the galoshes! 'swish, swish' like a Lenten birch . . . but he has trinkets on his watch-chain! So he is not destitute! They always have cornelian charms on their chains, like dead flesh cut from a neighbour's back . . .

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

listen to his galoshes . . . beasts, beasts, beastly, beast-lie, beastliest, swish, swish! Look out! he sees me! . . . he sees me! (*he bows towards the street*). . . He greets me first! he smiles! He waves his hand . . . and . . . (*sits down weeping by the writing-desk*) . . . he has gone past!

KRISTINA. Thank God!

ELIS. He passed on! . . . But he will return! . . . Let's go out in the sunshine.

KRISTINA. And Peter's dinner?

ELIS. Since I'm not invited, I am not going. Besides, what business have I in such a happy company! To meet a disloyal friend! I should only suffer on his account not to feel hurt on my own!

KRISTINA. Thanks for staying with us!

ELIS. I like nothing better, as you know! . . . Shall we go?

KRISTINA. Yes, this way! (*Goes to the left.*)

ELIS (*pats BENJAMIN on the head as he goes past him*).
Courage, my lad!

(BENJAMIN hides his face in his hands.)

ELIS (*takes the Lenten birch from the table and places it behind the mirror*). It was not an olive branch that the dove brought – it was a birch! (*Goes out.*)

(ELEONORA enters from the background; a sixteen-year-old girl with a plait down her back. She carries a yellow daffodil in a pot. Without seeing or pretending to see BENJAMIN she takes the water-bottle from the sideboard and waters the flower, places it on the dinner-table and sits down at the table opposite BENJAMIN. She looks at him and mimics his gestures.)

E A S T E R

(BENJAMIN looks at her surprised.)

ELEONORA (*pointing at the daffodil*). Do you know what that is?

BENJAMIN (*childishly*). Don't I just! It's a daffodil.

... But who are you?

ELEONORA (*kindly, sadly*). Yes, who are you?

BENJAMIN (*as before*). My name is Benjamin and I am boarding here with Mrs. Heyst.

ELEONORA. I see! My name is Eleonora and I am a daughter of the house.

BENJAMIN. How strange that they have never talked of you!

ELEONORA. One does not talk of the dead!

BENJAMIN. The dead!

ELEONORA. I am dead in the eyes of the world, for I have done something very wicked.

BENJAMIN. You!

ELEONORA. Yes, I have embezzled trustee funds – that didn't matter so much, for ill-gotten gains never thrive – but that my old father was blamed for it and put in prison; that, you see, can never be forgiven.

BENJAMIN. How strangely and beautifully you speak ... and it never occurred to me that my inheritance might have been ill-gotten?

ELEONORA. One should not hold men in bondage, but set them free.

BENJAMIN. Well, you have delivered me from the mortification of having been cheated.

ELEONORA. So you are under a guardian ...

BENJAMIN. Yes, one whose sad lot it is to do time for the crime of these poor people.

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

ELEONORA. You shouldn't use such hard words; if you do, I'll leave you; I am so delicate that I cannot bear anything hard! And yet you suffer all this for my sake?

BENJAMIN. For your father's sake.

ELEONORA. That's all one, for he and I are one and the same person. (*Pause.*) I have been very ill . . . why are you so sad?

BENJAMIN. I have had a bad set-back!

ELEONORA. Need you be sorry about that? 'The rod and the chastisement teach wisdom, and he who hateth chastisement shall die.' What was your set-back?

BENJAMIN. I failed in my Latin examination, though I felt so sure.

ELEONORA. I see, I see, you were so sure, so sure that you could have wagered you would pass.

BENJAMIN. Yes, and I did.

ELEONORA. I thought so! Well, you see, it happened because you were too sure.

BENJAMIN. Do you think that was the reason?

ELEONORA. Of course it was! Pride goes before a fall!

BENJAMIN. I'll remember that next time.

ELEONORA. That's right. And the sacrifice which pleases God is a contrite heart.

BENJAMIN. Are you religious?

ELEONORA. Yes, I'm religious!

BENJAMIN. I mean really?

ELEONORA. And so do I. So much so that if you were to speak ill of God, my benefactor, I wouldn't sit at the same table with you.

BENJAMIN. How old are you?

E A S T E R

ELEONORA. For me there is neither time nor space. I am everywhere, and of all times; I am in father's prison and in my brother's schoolroom. I am in my mother's kitchen and in my sister's shop far away in America. When things go well for my sister and she sells much, I feel her joy, and when things go badly with her I suffer, but I suffer most when she does wrong. Benjamin, you are called Benjamin because you are the youngest of my friends. . . . Yes, everybody is my friend. . . . Will you let me mother you, and I will suffer for you too?

BENJAMIN. I don't really understand what you say, but I do seem to grasp the meaning of your thoughts. And now I'll do anything you like.

ELEONORA. Will you stop judging people, to begin with, even those who are convicted criminals? . . .

BENJAMIN. Yes, but I must have a reason. You see, I have studied philosophy!

ELEONORA. Oh, have you? Then you must help me to explain these words of a great philosopher. He says: 'Whosoever hateth the righteous becometh himself a wrong-doer'!

BENJAMIN. By all the laws of logic that means that we may be foredoomed to commit crime. . . .

ELEONORA. And that crime itself is a punishment.

BENJAMIN. That's really deep! One would almost think it was Kant or Schopenhauer.

ELEONORA. I don't know!

BENJAMIN. In what book have you read it?

ELEONORA. In the Scriptures!

BENJAMIN. Really? Are there things like that in them?

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

ELEONORA. What an ignorant, neglected child you are! If only I might bring you up!

BENJAMIN. You dear little thing!

ELEONORA. But surely there's no evil in you! Rather, you look good. . . . What's the name of your Latin teacher?

BENJAMIN. Mr. Algren!

ELEONORA. I shall remember that! . . . Oh! now my father is in great sorrow! They are cruel to him. (*Stands still, as if listening.*) Do you hear the singing in the telephone wires . . . it is the hard words which the beautiful soft, red copper cannot bear . . . when people speak ill of each other on the telephone, the copper wails and accuses - (*severely*) - and every word is written in the book . . . and at the end of time comes the reckoning!

BENJAMIN. How severe you are!

ELEONORA. Not I! not I! How could I dare to be? I? I? (*She goes to the stove, opens the door and takes out some torn pieces of white note-paper.*)

(*BENJAMIN gets up and looks at the paper, which ELEONORA pieces together on the dining-table.*)

ELEONORA (*aside*). That people can be so careless as to leave their secrets in stoves. . . . Wherever I come I go straight to the stove! But I never put anything to a wrong use, I should never dare, for then evil would befall me! . . . Now what's this? (*Reads.*)

BENJAMIN. It's Mr. Peter writing to make an appointment with Kristina. . . . I've expected this for some time!

E A S T E R

ELEONORA (*covers the paper with her hand*). Oh! You! What have you expected? Tell me, you evil creature, who think only evil! This letter will bring nothing but good, for I know Kristina, who is going to be my sister-in-law. And this meeting will avert a misfortune from my brother Elis. . . . Will you promise me to say nothing, Benjamin?

BENJAMIN. I don't think I should dare to mention it!

ELEONORA. How wrong of people to have secrets. . . . They think themselves wise, and are fools! . . . But what business had I to go there.

BENJAMIN. Why are you so inquisitive?

ELEONORA. It's part of my illness, you see, that I must know everything, or else I get restless. . . .

BENJAMIN. Know everything?

ELEONORA. It is a fault I can't overcome. But anyhow I know what the starlings say.

BENJAMIN. They can't talk, can they?

ELEONORA. Have you never heard of starlings that have been taught to talk?

BENJAMIN. Oh yes! those that have been taught!

ELEONORA. Consequently starlings can learn to talk! Now there are some that teach themselves, they are autodidacts . . . they sit and listen, of course, without our knowing it, and then they say it after us. I heard two of them sitting talking in the walnut tree just now as I came along.

BENJAMIN. How funny you are! But what did they say then?

ELEONORA. Well! 'Peter' said the one, 'Judas' said

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

the other – ‘ditto’ said the first, ‘Fy, fy, fy’ said the second. But have you noticed that the nightingales only sing in the garden of the deaf and dumb over there?

BENJAMIN. Yes, everybody knows that! Why is it?

ELEONORA. Because those who have hearing do not hear what the nightingales say; but the deaf and dumb do hear it!

BENJAMIN. Tell me some more fairy tales!

ELEONORA. I will, if you are a good boy!

BENJAMIN. How do you mean, good?

ELEONORA. Well, you must never take up my words and never say at one time you said this, at another time you said that. . . . Shall I tell you something more about the birds? There is an evil bird called the rat buzzard. As you can hear by its name, it lives on rats. But because it is a bad bird it has difficulty in catching the rats, and therefore it can only say one word, which sounds like the ‘miaow’ of a cat. When the bird says ‘miaow’ the rats run and hide, but the buzzard itself doesn’t understand what it says . . . and must often go without food because it is a nasty bird! – Do you want to hear any more? Or shall I talk about the flowers? . . . Do you know, when I was ill I had to take a drug made of henbane, which has the power of turning the eye into a magnifying glass. . . . But with belladonna we see everything smaller. . . . Well, anyhow, now I can see further than most other people and I can see the stars in broad daylight!

BENJAMIN. But then the stars are not even up?

ELEONORA. How funny you are! The stars are always up. . . . Don’t you know; and now I sit facing north

E A S T E R

and I see Cassiopea looking like a 'w' placed in the middle of the Milky Way. . . . Can you see it?

BENJAMIN. No, I can't!

ELEONORA. Notice that one person *can* see what another cannot see . . . therefore don't be so sure of *your* eyes. . . . Now I will tell you about this flower on the table. It is a daffodil, which has its home in Switzerland . . . it has a cup which has drunk the sunlight, that is why it is yellow and soothes pain. . . . I passed a flower shop just now and saw it, and wanted to give it to my brother Elis. When I tried to get in through the door I found it locked . . . for this is confirmation day . . . but I had to get the flower, so I took out my keys and tried them, and what do you think! my latchkey fitted. . . . I went in. . . . Well, do you understand the silent language of flowers? Every perfume expresses ever so many thoughts, and these thoughts crowded in upon me; and with my magnifying eye I looked into their workshops, which nobody has seen. And they spoke to me of the sorrows which the thoughtless gardener had caused them - I don't say cruel, for he was only careless. . . . Then I put one krona and my card on the counter, took the flower, and went out.

BENJAMIN. How careless! Supposing they miss the flower and don't find the money?

ELEONORA. That's true! You're right!

BENJAMIN. A coin may disappear, and if they only find your card, you are lost!

ELEONORA. But surely nobody would believe that I meant to take anything?

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

BENJAMIN (*looks fixedly at her*). No?

ELEONORA (*looks at him and rises*). Oh! I know what you mean! Like father, like child! How careless I was! How! . . . Well! what must be must be! (*Sits down.*) So be it, then!

BENJAMIN. Can't it be put right?

ELEONORA. Sh! Talk about something else! . . . Mr. Algren! . . . Poor Elis! Poor all of us! But it is Easter, and we must suffer. And isn't there a concert to-morrow? And aren't they playing Haydn's *Sieben Worte des Erlösers*, 'Mother, behold thy son'? (*She covers her face with her hands and weeps.*)

BENJAMIN. What was the illness you had?

ELEONORA. My illness is not 'sickness unto death' but in honour of God! 'I awaited good and evil came; I awaited the light and the darkness came!' . . . What kind of childhood had you, Benjamin?

BENJAMIN. I don't know. Dismal! And yours?

ELEONORA. I never had one. I was born old. . . . I knew of everything when I was born, and when I learned things it was only like remembering. I knew of people's . . . thoughtlessness and foolishness when I was four years old, and that's why people were unkind to me!

BENJAMIN. Everything you say I seem to have thought too!

ELEONORA. And probably you have! . . . What made you think that my coin would disappear in the flower shop?

BENJAMIN. Because the unpleasant must always happen!

E A S T E R

ELEONORA. So you've noticed that too! . . . Hush! somebody is coming! (*Looks towards the back.*) I hear . . . it's Elis! . . . Oh! I am so happy! . . . my only friend on earth! (*Her face becomes clouded.*) But . . . he doesn't expect me! And he will not be pleased to see me. No, he won't! . . . certainly not! — Benjamin, Benjamin, put on a friendly face and be cheerful when my poor brother comes. I shall go so that you may prepare him for my coming. But no hard words, they hurt me so; do you hear! Give me your hand!

(BENJAMIN offers his hand.)

ELEONORA (*kisses the top of his head*). That's it! Now you are my little brother! God bless you and keep you! (*She goes out to the left and in passing pats the sleeve of Elis's overcoat affectionately.*) Poor Elis!

(ELIS enters from the background, worried.)

(MRS. HEYST enters from the kitchen.)

ELIS. So there's Mother!

MRS. HEYST. Was it you? It seemed to me I heard a strange voice!

ELIS. I have news! Ran up against the lawyer in the street!

MRS. HEYST. What then?

ELIS. The case will now go to the Court of Appeal . . . and to save time I must read through all the reports of the trial.

MRS. HEYST. Well, you'll soon do that!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

ELIS (*indicating the documents on the writing-desk*). Oh! I thought all that was over, and now I must live through all this tale of the Passion again . . . all the accusations, all the evidence and proof! All over again!

MRS. HEYST. But then he will be acquitted by the Court of Appeal.

ELIS. No, Mother, you know he confessed!

MRS. HEYST. Yes, but there may be a technical error, that was the lawyer's *last* word when I spoke with him!

ELIS. He said that to comfort you!

MRS. HEYST. Aren't you going to that dinner?

ELIS. No!

MRS. HEYST. Now you've changed your mind again!

ELIS. Yes!

MRS. HEYST. That is bad!

ELIS. Yes, I know, but am I not tossed about like a cork on the waters?

MRS. HEYST. I felt certain I heard a strange voice, which I recognized! But I must have heard wrong! — (*points at the overcoat*). That coat mustn't hang there, as I told you! (*Goes to the right.*)

ELIS (*moves to the left and catches sight of the daffodil on the dining-table. To BENJAMIN*). Where did that flower come from?

BENJAMIN. A young lady brought it!

ELIS. Young lady! What's this? Who was she?

BENJAMIN. It was . . .

ELIS. Was it . . . my sister?

BENJAMIN. Yes!

ELIS (*sinks down by the dining-table*). (*Pause.*) Did you speak to her?

E A S T E R

BENJAMIN. Oh, yes!

ELIS. My God, is it not yet enough! . . . Was she unkind to you?

BENJAMIN. She? No, she was as kind as kind could be!

ELIS. Strange! . . . Did she speak of me? Was she very angry with me?

BENJAMIN. No, on the contrary! She said you were her best and only friend on earth. . . .

ELIS. What a wonderful transformation!

BENJAMIN. And when she went, she stroked your coat, over there, on the sleeve. . . .

ELIS. Went? Where did she go?

BENJAMIN (*points to the door on the left*). In there!

ELIS. So she's there?

BENJAMIN. Yes!

ELIS. You look so happy and good, Benjamin.

BENJAMIN. She talked so beautifully to me. . . .

ELIS. What did she talk about?

BENJAMIN. She told me fairy tales and then there was a lot about religion. . . .

ELIS (*rises*). Which made you happy?

BENJAMIN. Yes!

ELIS. Poor Eleonora. So unhappy herself, and yet she can make others happy! (*Goes to the left, hesitatingly.*)
God help me!

ACT II

GOOD FRIDAY

Musical Prelude to this Act.

Haydn. 'Sieben Worte des Erlösers.'

Largo, No. 1. Pater dimitte illis.

The same scene, but the curtains drawn and illuminated from the outside by the gas lamp in the street. The hanging lamp is lighted; on the dining-table a small paraffin lamp. There is a fire visible in the anthracite stove.

At the sewing-table are seated ELIS and KRISTINA, both idle. Opposite to each other at the dining-table are seated ELEONORA and BENJAMIN, reading, with the lamp between them. ELEONORA has a shawl over her shoulders.

All are dressed in black. ELIS and BENJAMIN wear white ties.

On the writing-desk are spread out the documents relating to the trial. On the sewing-table is the daffodil. On the dining-table is an old pendulum clock.

From time to time the shadow of a passer-by in the street is seen on the curtains.

ELIS (*half aloud to KRISTINA*). Yes, a long Good Friday! but how terribly long! And the snow lies on the street like straw outside the house of the dying; every sound has ceased – except the bass of the organ, which I hear even here. . . .

KRISTINA. I suppose mother has gone to evening service. . . .

ELIS. Yes, she couldn't bear to go to morning service . . . people's eyes wound her. . . .

E A S T E R

KRISTINA. How strange all these people are; they expect us all to keep out of their way, they think it right and proper. . . .

ELIS. Yes, and they may be right. . . .

KRISTINA. For the false step of a single member the whole family is banned. . . .

ELIS. Yes, so it is!

(ELEONORA *pushes the lamp over to BENJAMIN, so that he may see better.*)

ELIS (*indicating ELEONORA and BENJAMIN*). Look at those two!

KRISTINA. Isn't it beautiful! . . . And how well they agree!

ELIS. What luck that Eleonora is so quiet! If only it would last!

KRISTINA. Why shouldn't it?

ELIS. Because . . . good luck doesn't usually last long! To-day I'm afraid of everything.

(BENJAMIN *gently pushes the lamp over to ELEONORA, that she may see better.*)

KRISTINA. Look at them!

ELIS. Have you noticed how changed Benjamin is! Instead of sulking he seems calm and resigned. . . .

KRISTINA. How very gentle and sweet her whole nature is — one cannot properly say 'beautiful'!

ELIS. And she brings with her an angel of peace, who goes about invisible, breathing a calm peace. Even mother when she first saw her, showed such a calm as I never expected!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

KRISTINA. Do you think she is quite cured now?

ELIS. Yes, if only that extreme sensitiveness did not remain. She is sitting now reading the story of Christ's Passion; and sometimes she cries.

KRISTINA. Well, I remember we did that in school too, on Wednesdays in Lent.

ELIS. Don't talk so loud, she has such sharp ears!

KRISTINA. But not now! she is so far away!

ELIS. But have you noticed how something dignified, something noble has come into Benjamin's face?

KRISTINA. It's suffering; happiness makes everything commonplace.

ELIS. Perhaps it is rather . . . love! Don't you think those two young people. . . ?

KRISTINA. Sh! Sh! Sh! . . . Don't touch the butterfly's wings, else it will fly away. . . !

ELIS. They are looking at each other, I think, and only pretending to read, for they are not turning over the pages, as far as I can hear.

KRISTINA. Sh!

ELIS. Look, now she can't control herself. . . .

(ELEONORA rises, goes up to BENJAMIN on tiptoe and places her shawl over his shoulders. BENJAMIN resists mildly but yields, whereupon ELEONORA sits down again and pushes over the lamp to BENJAMIN's side.)

KRISTINA. Poor Eleonora. She does not know how well she means.

ELIS (*rises*). Now I must get back to my reports.

KRISTINA. Can you see any point in all this reading?

ELIS. Only one, to keep hope alive for mother! But

E A S T E R

though I too only pretend to read, yet the words prick like thorns in my eyes. The evidence of the witnesses, sums of money, father's admissions . . . as for example, 'The accused confessed amidst tears' . . . So many tears, so many tears. And these documents . . . with their stamps which remind me of forged bank-notes or prison locks, and the tape and the red seals . . . like the five wounds of Jesus . . . and sentences without end, everlasting tortures. . . . That is a fitting task for Good Friday. . . . Yesterday the sun shone; yesterday we went into the country in our imagination. . . . Kristina . . . Fancy if we had to stay here all the summer!

KRISTINA. Then we should save a good deal of money . . . but it would be sad!

ELIS. I should never survive it . . . I have stayed here three summers . . . and it's like a tomb. In the middle of the day one sees the long grey street winding like a trench – not a soul, not a horse, not a dog! . . . And from the sewers the rats come out, as the cats are away on their summer holiday – and inside, looking in their window mirrors, are a few people who have been left behind; they sit and spy out their neighbours' clothes and say 'Look at that fellow wearing his winter clothes!' . . . their neighbours' down-at-heel shoes and their defects – and from the poorer quarters steal out cripples, who had been in hiding before; people without noses and ears, bad people and unhappy . . . and they sit in the great promenade and sun themselves, just as if they had taken the town . . . where not long ago pretty, well-dressed children played to the tender, encouraging words of their beautiful mothers there now tramp flocks

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

of tatterdemalions who curse and torture each other – I remember a midsummer day two years ago!

KRISTINA. Elis, Elis! look forward, look forward!

ELIS. Is it brighter there?

KRISTINA. Let us believe it is!

ELIS (*sits down at the writing-desk*). If only it would stop snowing outside, and we could go out for a long walk!

KRISTINA. Oh, my dear, last night you wanted the darkness to return, so that we could hide from people's eyes – 'The darkness is so delightful, so good for one,' you said, 'it is like pulling the blankets over one's head'!

ELIS. You see the misery is equally great either way. . . . (*He reads his papers.*) The worst thing in this case is the impertinent questions about father's way of life. – It says that we had splendid parties – one witness says that he drank . . . ! No, this is too much! I can't go on! . . . But still I must, . . . to the end! . . . Don't you feel cold?

KRISTINA. No, but it's not warm either! . . . Isn't Lina at home?

ELIS. You know she has gone to communion.

KRISTINA. I suppose mother will be home soon.

ELIS. I am always afraid when she has been out and comes back, because she hears so much and sees so much, and everything is bad.

KRISTINA. There is an extraordinarily melancholy strain in your family.

ELIS. That is why only melancholy people ever wished to associate with us! Cheerful people have shunned us!

KRISTINA. That was mother coming in at the kitchen door!

E A S T E R

ELIS. Don't be impatient with her, Kristina!

KRISTINA. Of course not! It's worst of all for her! But I don't understand her!

ELIS. She hides her shame as best she can, and that's why she is hard to understand. Poor mother!

MRS. HEYST (*enters, in black, with a hymn book and a handkerchief in her hand*). Good evening, children.

ALL (*except BENJAMIN, who silently greets her*). Good evening, Mother dear!

MRS. HEYST. You are all in black as if you were in mourning.

(*Silence.*)

ELIS. Is it still snowing?

MRS. HEYST. Yes, it's sleeting! It's cold in here! . . . (*Advances to ELEONORA and pats her.*) Well, little girl, you are reading and studying, I see! (*To BENJAMIN.*) But you are not studying much!

(*ELEONORA takes her mother's hand and lifts it to her lips.*)

MRS. HEYST (*suppressing her emotion*). There, there, my child!

ELIS. You were at evening service, Mother!

MRS. HEYST. Yes! it was the curate and I don't like him!

ELIS. Did you meet anybody you knew?

MRS. HEYST (*sits down at the sewing-table*). It would have been better if I hadn't!

ELIS. Then I know who . . .

MRS. HEYST. Lindkvist! And he came up to me. . . .

ELIS. How cruel, how cruel.

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

MRS. HEYST. Asked how things were . . . and imagine my horror, he asked if he might call this evening.

ELIS. On the evening of a holy day?

MRS. HEYST. I was speechless! And he understood my silence to mean consent! (*Pause.*) He may be here at any moment!

ELIS (*rises*). Here? Now?

MRS. HEYST. He said he wanted to leave a paper which was urgent.

ELIS. He will take the furniture.

MRS. HEYST. But he looked so strange . . . I didn't understand him!

ELIS. Well, let him come! He has the law on his side and we must submit. We must receive him properly when he comes.

MRS. HEYST. If only I'm spared the sight of him!

ELIS. Yes, you can keep indoors. . . .

MRS. HEYST. But he mustn't take the furniture! Where should we live if he took all the things away? We can't live in empty rooms! Can we?

ELIS. The foxes have their holes and the birds their nests . . . there are homeless people who live in the forest.

MRS. HEYST. That's where rogues should live, but not honest folk!

ELIS (*at the writing-table*). Now, I must read, Mother!

MRS. HEYST. Have you found any mistake?

ELIS. No, I don't think there are any!

MRS. HEYST. But I just met the public notary and he says that possibly some formal error might be found, an incompetent witness, an unproved allegation or

E A S T E R

contradictory evidence; you can't be reading carefully enough!

ELIS. Of course, Mother, but it is so painful. . . .

MRS. HEYST. Listen, I met the public notary just now – it was quite true, what I said – and he also told me about some burglary which occurred in the town yesterday, in broad daylight.

(ELEONORA and BENJAMIN prick up their ears.)

ELIS. Burglary? In this town? Where?

MRS. HEYST. It was in a flower shop in Convent Street. But the whole thing was very strange. They say this is how it happened: the shopkeeper had closed his shop to go to church, where his son – or perhaps it was his daughter – was to be confirmed. When he came home about three o'clock . . . perhaps it was four, but that doesn't matter . . . the shop door was open and the flowers were missing, a large number, especially a yellow tulip, which he noticed first!

ELIS. A tulip! If it had been a daffodil I should have been frightened.

MRS. HEYST. No, it was a tulip, that I'm certain. And now the police have the matter in hand.

(ELEONORA has risen, as if she wishes to speak, but BENJAMIN goes up to her and whispers.)

MRS. HEYST. Fancy, breaking in on Maundy Thursday when the children were being confirmed. . . . Nothing but rogues! the whole town! That's why they put innocent people into prison!

ELIS. Don't they suspect anybody, then?

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

MRS. HEYST. No-o —! But he was a strange sort of thief, for he took no money out of the till! . . .

KRISTINA. Oh! that this day were over!

MRS. HEYST. And if only Lina would come home! . . . Yes, and I heard people talk of Peter's dinner yesterday! Even the Lord-Lieutenant was there.

ELIS. That surprises me, for Peter was always considered to be opposed to the Lord-Lieutenant's party!

MRS. HEYST. Then I suppose he must have changed.

ELIS. He is not called Peter for nothing, it seems.

MRS. HEYST. What have you against the Lord-Lieutenant?

ELIS. He is an obstructor! He obstructs everything, he obstructed the people's high school, he obstructed military drill for the schoolboys, he wanted to forbid harmless bicycles; and the fine idea of holiday camps, and he has obstructed me!

MRS. HEYST. I don't understand, all that . . . but it doesn't matter. However, the Lord-Lieutenant made a speech . . . and Peter responded . . . !

ELIS . . . with emotion, I suppose, and denied his teacher, and said 'I know not the man'. And the cock crew again! Was not the Lord-Lieutenant called Pontius, with the surname Pilate?

(ELEONORA makes a move as if she wishes to speak, but restrains herself.)

MRS. HEYST. You mustn't be so bitter, Elis. Men are men, and we must put up with them as they are.

ELIS. Hush! I hear Lindkvist coming!

MRS. HEYST. Can you hear him in the snow?

E A S T E R

ELIS. Yes, I hear his stick on the pavement and his leather galoshes! . . . You had better go, Mother!

MRS. HEYST. No, now I want to stay and tell him something.

ELIS. Mother dear, please go! It will be too painful!

MRS. HEYST (*rises, very upset*). May the day I was born be blotted out!

KRISTINA. Don't curse!

MRS. HEYST (*with an expression of nobility*). 'Were it not more just that an unrighteous man should suffer this tribulation and an evildoer this misery.'

ELEONORA (*with a sudden cry of agony*). Mother!

MRS. HEYST. My God, why hast Thou forsaken me! And my children! (*Goes to the left.*)

ELIS (*listening outside*). He has stopped! . . . perhaps he thinks it is unfitting . . . or too cruel! . . . But I don't think he does, he who could write such terrible letters! . . . They were all on blue paper, and ever since I have not been able to see a blue letter without trembling!

KRISTINA. What do you intend to say, what will you propose?

ELIS. I don't know! I have lost my self-assurance, my power of reasoning. . . . Shall I fall on my knees to him and beseech him for mercy? . . . Can you hear him? I hear nothing but the blood singing in my ears!

KRISTINA. Let us imagine the worst! Suppose he takes everything. . . .

ELIS. Then the landlord will come and ask for a surety, which I can't get. . . . He will want a

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

surety since the furniture is no longer security for the rent!

KRISTINA (*who has been looking out into the street behind the curtains*). He's no longer there! He's gone!

ELIS. Ah! . . . Do you know, mother's resignation and indifference pain me more than her anger!

KRISTINA. Her resignation is only a pretence, or imaginary. There was something of the roaring of the lioness in her last words. . . . Did you notice how great she was?

ELIS. Do you know, when I think of Lindkvist now, I see him as a good-natured giant, who only wants to frighten children! Why do I think of this so suddenly?

KRISTINA. Thoughts come, thoughts go!

Elis. What good luck that I was not at the dinner yesterday, I should certainly have made a speech attacking the Lord-Lieutenant . . . and then I should have ruined everything for myself and for all of us! That was a great piece of luck!

KRISTINA. There you are!

ELIS. Thanks for your advice. You know your Peter, you do!

KRISTINA. My Peter!

ELIS. I meant . . . mine! Look, now he's back again! Woe to us! (*On the curtain is seen the shadow of a man approaching hesitatingly. The shadow grows larger until it is gigantic. All are thrown into extreme fear.*) The giant, look! the giant who will devour us!

KRISTINA. Now, hadn't we better smile, as if it were a fairy tale!

E A S T E R

ELIS. I can't smile any more! (*The shadow grows less and vanishes.*)

KRISTINA. Then look at the stick, and you must laugh!

ELIS. He has gone. Yes, now I can breathe, for now he will not return until to-morrow. Ah!

KRISTINA. And to-morrow the sun will shine, it is the eve of the day of resurrection, the snow will be gone and the birds will sing!

ELIS. Go on! I *see* all that you say!

KRISTINA. If only you could see into my heart; if only you could see my thoughts, my good intentions, my most ardent prayer, Elis, Elis, I want to . . . (*Restrains herself.*)

ELIS. What? tell me . . . !

KRISTINA. I want to . . . ask one thing of you.

ELIS. Tell me!

KRISTINA. It is a test! Bear in mind that it's a test, Elis!

ELIS. A test! a proof! So be it, then . . . !

KRISTINA. Let me . . . no, I dare not! It *might* fail!

(ELEONORA *grows attentive.*)

ELIS. Why do you torment me?

KRISTINA. I shall regret it, I know. . . . Well, so be it! Elis, let me go to the concert this evening.

ELIS. Which concert?

KRISTINA. Haydn's *Sieben Worte des Erlösers* in the Cathedral!

ELIS. With whom?

KRISTINA. Alice . . .

ELIS. And?

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

KRISTINA. Peter!

ELIS. With Peter?

KRISTINA. See, now your face darkens! I am sorry, but it is too late!

ELIS. Yes, it is rather late! But explain yourself!

KRISTINA. I warned you that I could not give an explanation, and therefore asked you to trust me implicitly!

ELIS (*gently*). Go! I trust you; but it hurts me all the same that you should like to be with that traitor!

KRISTINA. I know that. But it is a test!

ELIS. Which I am not able to stand!

KRISTINA. You must!

ELIS. I want to, but I cannot! – But you must go anyhow!

KRISTINA. Your hand!

ELIS (*offers his hand*). There!

(*The telephone rings.*)

ELIS (*at the telephone*). Hallo! . . . no answer. . . . Hallo! . . . My own voice replies! . . . Who is there? . . . How strange! I hear my own words like an echo!

KRISTINA. That happens sometimes!

ELIS. Hallo! . . . This is uncanny! (*Rings off.*) Now go, Kristina! Without explanations, without fuss. I shall stand the test!

KRISTINA. Do so, and all will be well with us!

ELIS. I will! . . .

(KRISTINA *goes to the right.*)

ELIS. Why do you go that way?

E A S T E R

KRISTINA. My things are there! Well! good-bye for the present! (*Goes out.*)

ELIS. Good-bye, dear friend . . . (*Pause*) for ever! (*Rushes out to the left.*)

ELEONORA. God help us, what have I done now? The police are looking for the culprit, and if I am discovered . . . poor mother, and Elis!

BENJAMIN (*childishly*). Eleonora, you must say that I did it!

ELEONORA. You, can you bear another's guilt, you child?

BENJAMIN. That's easily done, when you know you are innocent!

ELEONORA. But we must never tell stories!

BENJAMIN. Then let me telephone to the flower shop and tell them how it happened!

ELEONORA. No, I have done wrong, and I must be punished with fears. I have awakened their fear of thieves, and fear will overtake *me*.

BENJAMIN. But if the police come. . . .

ELEONORA. Yes, that is hard . . . but then it is meant so! — Oh! that this day were over! (*Goes to the pendulum clock on the dining-table and moves the hands.*) . . . Dear little clock, move a little faster! Tick, tick, ping, ping, ping. Now it's eight! ping, ping, ping, now it's nine! — ten! — eleven! — twelve! Now it's Easter Eve! Now the sun will soon be rising and then we will write on the Easter eggs! I shall write this: 'Behold, Satan hath desired to get possession of thee, that he may sift thee like wheat, but I have prayed for thee' . . .

BENJAMIN. Why do you hurt yourself so, Eleonora?

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

ELEONORA. I, hurt! O Benjamin. Think of all the flowers that have opened out, the anemones and snow-drops which have been standing out in the snow all day and all night, shivering in the darkness! Think what they must suffer! The night's the worst, of course, when it is dark, and they get frightened of the darkness and can't run away . . . and they stand and wait for the daylight. Everything, everything suffers, but the flowers most of all; and the birds of passage that have come from the south! where will they sleep to-night?

BENJAMIN (*childishly*). They'll sit in hollow trees, of course!

ELEONORA. Surely there are not so many hollow trees that all of them can get in! I have only seen two hollow trees in the parks hereabouts, and there the owls live, as you know, and they kill the small birds. . . . Poor Elis, who thinks that Kristina has left him, but I know she will come back!

BENJAMIN. If you know it, why didn't you say so?

ELEONORA. Because Elis must suffer, everybody must suffer to-day, on Good Friday, that they may remember Christ's suffering on the cross. (*The sound of a police whistle is heard from the street.*) (*Starts*). What was that?

BENJAMIN (*rises*). Don't you know?

ELEONORA. No!

BENJAMIN. It was the police!

ELEONORA. Oh! . . . yes, it sounded like that when they came to arrest father . . . and then I fell ill! And now they are coming to take me!

BENJAMIN (*places himself facing the door, in front of*

E A S T E R

ELEONORA). No, they must not take you! I will defend you, Elconora!

ELEONORA. That's noble, Benjamin, but you mustn't. . . .

BENJAMIN (*looks through the curtains*). There are two of them! (*ELEONORA tries to push BENJAMIN away, but he resists gently.*) Not you, Elconora, for then – I don't want to live any longer!

ELEONORA. Go and sit down in that chair! child, go and sit down!

(BENJAMIN *obeys reluctantly.*)

(*Looks out from behind the curtains without concealing herself.*) It was only two boys! Oh! we of little faith! Do you think God is so cruel, when I have done no evil, and only acted thoughtlessly . . . I deserved it! Why did I doubt?

BENJAMIN. But to-morrow someone will come and take the furniture.

ELEONORA. Let him come! And we shall have to go! Leave everything . . . all the old furniture which father collected for us, and which I have seen since I was a little child! Yes, we ought not to possess anything which binds us to earth. Out on the stony paths and wander with wounded feet, for the road leads upwards, that is why it is toilsome. . . .

BENJAMIN. Now you are tormenting yourself again, Elconora!

ELEONORA. Let me! But do you know what I find most difficult to part from? It's the clock over there! It was there when I was born and it has

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

measured out all my hours and days. . . . (*She lifts the clock from the table.*) . . . Listen! it beats like a heart – just like a heart . . . and it stopped at the hour when grandfather died, for we had it even then! Good-bye, little clock, stop soon again. . . . Do you know, it used to go fast when we had bad luck in the house, just as if it wished to get over it – for *our* sakes, of course! But when things were bright it went slow so that we might enjoy them longer. That was a kind clock! But we also had an unkind one . . . and that's why it must hang in the kitchen now! It could not bear music, for as soon as Elis played the piano it began to strike. We all noticed it, not only I. And that is why it must stay in the kitchen, for it was naughty! But Lina doesn't like it either, for it's not quiet at night and she can't cook eggs by it . . . they are always hard-boiled, Lina says. Now you are laughing!

BENJAMIN. What else can I do? . . .

ELEONORA. You are a nice boy, Benjamin, but you must be serious! Think of the birch standing behind the mirror there!

BENJAMIN. But you talk so funnily that I can't help smiling. . . . And why should we always cry?

ELEONORA. If we are not to weep in the vale of sorrow where then shall we weep?

BENJAMIN. Hm!

ELEONORA. You would like to smile all day long, and that is why you've suffered! And I only like you when you are serious. Remember that!

BENJAMIN. Do you think we shall come through all this, Eleonora?

E A S T E R

ELEONORA. Yes, most of it will clear away as soon as Good Friday is over, but not everything. To-day the birch, to-morrow Easter eggs! To-day snow, to-morrow thaw! To-day death, to-morrow resurrection!

BENJAMIN. How wise you are!

ELEONORA. Yes, already I feel that it is clearing up for fine weather outside ; that the snow is melting. . . . It smells of melting snow even in here . . . and to-morrow the violets will open against the south wall! The clouds have lifted. I can feel it in my breathing. . . . Oh! I know so well when the heavens are open! Go and draw the curtains, Benjamin. I want God to see us!

(BENJAMIN rises and obeys; the moonlight falls into the room.)

ELEONORA. Look at the full moon! It is the Easter moon! and the sun is still there you know, though the light comes from the moon!

ACT III

EASTER EVE

Musical Prelude.

Haydn. 'Sieben Worte des Erlösers.'

No. 5. Adagio.

The same scene, but the curtains are pulled aside. The landscape outside the same, but the sky is overcast and grey. The stove lit and the doors in the background closed.

ELEONORA sits in front of the stove holding a bunch of wild anemones in front of her.

BENJAMIN enters from the right.

ELEONORA. Where have you been so long, Benjamin?

BENJAMIN. I haven't been long!

ELEONORA. I wanted you!

BENJAMIN. Where have you been then, Eleonora?

ELEONORA. I have been out in the market and have bought wild anemones, and now I shall warm them, for they are frozen, poor things!

BENJAMIN. Where is the sun?

ELEONORA. Behind the mists. There are no clouds to-day. It is only a mist from the sea, for it smells salt. . . .

BENJAMIN. Did you notice whether the birds were still alive outside?

ELEONORA. Yes, and not one will fall to earth except by God's will. But there were dead birds in the market. . . .

(ELIS enters from the right.)

ELIS. Has the newspaper come?

E A S T E R

ELEONORA. No, Elis!

(ELIS *walks across the stage; when he reaches the middle, KRISTINA comes in from the left.*)

KRISTINA (*without noticing ELIS*). Has the paper come?

ELEONORA. No, it hasn't!

(KRISTINA *walks across the stage to the right, past ELIS, who goes out to the left. They do not look at each other.*)

ELEONORA. Ugh! How cold it has become! Hate has come into the house! As long as love was here we could bear everything, but now, ugh! how cold!

BENJAMIN. Why are they asking for the newspaper?

ELEONORA. Don't you understand? There will be in it . . .

BENJAMIN. What?

ELEONORA. Everything! the burglary, the police, and more too. . . .

MRS. HEYST (*from the right*). Has the paper come?

ELEONORA. No, Mother dear!

MRS. HEYST (*goes out to the right again*). Tell me as soon as it comes!

ELEONORA. The paper, the paper. . . . Oh! if only the printing works had been smashed up, or if only the editor had fallen ill . . . no, I mustn't say that! Do you know, I was with father last night. . . .

BENJAMIN. Last night?

ELEONORA. Yes, in my sleep . . . and I was in America with my sister. . . . The day before yesterday she sold 30 dollars' worth and had 5 dollars profit.

BENJAMIN. Is that much or little? Eh?

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

ELEONORA. It's quite a lot!

BENJAMIN (*slyly*). Did you meet anyone you knew in the market?

ELEONORA. Why do you ask? You mustn't be artful with me, Benjamin. You want to know my secrets, but you shan't!

BENJAMIN. And you think you can learn mine that way!

ELEONORA. Do you hear how the telephone wires are singing? Now the newspaper is out, and people are telephoning! 'Have you read it?' 'Yes, I've read it!' 'Isn't it awful?'

BENJAMIN. What is awful?

ELEONORA. Everything! Life is altogether awful. But we must be content with our lot as it is! . . . Think of Elis and Kristina, they are fond of each other and they hate each other all the same, so that the thermometer falls when they pass through the room! She was at the concert last night, and to-day they don't speak to each other. . . . Why? Why?

BENJAMIN. Because your brother is jealous!

ELEONORA. Don't say that word! Besides, what do you know about jealousy, except that it is a disease, and consequently a punishment. We should not touch evil, lest it defile us! Just look at Elis; haven't you noticed how changed he is since he began to read those papers. . . .

BENJAMIN. About the trial?

ELEONORA. Yes! Doesn't it seem as if all the evil in them had penetrated into his soul and were now shining out from his face and his eyes. . . . Kristina feels

E A S T E R

it, and in order that the evil shan't touch her, she puts on armour of ice! Oh! those papers! . . . If only I might burn them! Malice and falsehood and revenge radiate from them. So, my child, you must keep yourself free from evil and impurity, both your lips and your heart!

BENJAMIN. How clearly you see everything!

ELEONORA. Do you know what is in store for me if Elis and the others get to know that it was I who bought the daffodil in such an odd way?

BENJAMIN. What will they do to you?

ELEONORA. I shall be sent back . . . where I came from, where the sun doesn't shine; where the walls are white and bare like a bathroom; where you only hear weeping and wailing; where I have wasted a year of my life.

BENJAMIN. Where do you mean?

ELEONORA. Where you are tortured worse than in prison, where the accursed dwell, where unrest has its home and where despair watches night and day, and whence no one returns!

BENJAMIN. Worse than prison, where do you mean?

ELEONORA. In prison one is condemned, but there one is damned! In prison one is examined and listened to! Over there one is not listened to. . . . Poor daffodil, the cause of it all. I meant so well and acted so wrongly.

BENJAMIN. But why don't you go to the shopkeeper and say 'This is how it happened.' You are just like a lamb being led to the slaughter.

ELEONORA. When it knows it must be slaughtered,

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

it doesn't complain and does not try to run away. What else can it do?

ELIS! (*enters from the left with a letter in his hand*). Has the paper not come yet?

ELEONORA. No, brother!

ELIS (*turns round and speaks into the kitchen*). Lina, go and buy a newspaper! . . .

MRS. HEYST (*enters from the right*. ELEONORA and BENJAMIN *alarmed*). Children, go away for a moment, please!

(ELEONORA and BENJAMIN *out to the left*.)

MRS. HEYST. You've got a letter?

ELIS. Yes!

MRS. HEYST. From the asylum?

ELIS. Yes!

MRS. HEYST. What do they want?

ELIS. They want Eleonora back.

MRS. HEYST. They shan't have her. She is my child!

ELIS. And my sister!

MRS. HEYST. What do you mean by that?

ELIS. I don't know! I can't think any more!

MRS. HEYST. But I can! . . . Eleonora, this child of sorrow, has brought joy,—not of this world it's true; but her unrest has been changed to peace, which she shares with us all! Sane or not! For me she is wise, for she knows how to bear the burden of life better than I, than we. Moreover, Elis, if I am sane, was I sane when I believed my husband innocent? I knew, quite well that he was convicted on material, tangible evidence and that he had confessed! . . . And you,

E A S T E R

Elis, are you in your senses when you don't see that Kristina loves you! And you think she hates you?

ELIS. It's an extraordinary way of loving!

MRS. HEYST. No! Your coldness freezes her heart, and it is you who hate. But you're wrong, and therefore you must suffer!

ELIS. How can I be wrong? Didn't she go out last night with my disloyal friend?

MRS. HEYST. Yes, she did, and with your knowledge. But why did she go? Well, you ought to be able to imagine why!

ELIS. No, I cannot!

MRS. HEYST. Very well then, you deserve all you've got!

(The kitchen door opens, a hand pushes in a newspaper, which MRS. HEYST takes and gives to ELIS.)

ELIS. That was the only real misfortune! Together with her I could have borne the rest! But now my last support is taken away from me and I am falling!

MRS. HEYST. Fall then, but fall rightly, so that you may rise once more! What news is there in the paper?

ELIS. I don't know. I'm afraid of the paper to-day!

MRS. HEYST. Give it to me and I'll read it!

ELIS. No, wait a moment! . . .

MRS. HEYST. What are you afraid of? What are you expecting? . . .

ELIS. The very worst!

MRS. HEYST. That has come already so many times . . . and you, child, if you knew my life . . . if you had been there when I saw your father go step by step to ruin, whilst I could not warn the many people he

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

brought into misfortune. When he fell, I felt myself an accomplice, for I knew of the crime, and if the judge had not been a sensible man, and understood the difficulties of my position as a wife, I should have been punished too!

ELIS. What was the cause of father's fall? I have never really understood it?

MRS. HEYST. Pride, as with all of us!

ELIS. And why should we innocent ones suffer for his faults?

MRS. HEYST. Be quiet!

(Pause, during which she takes the paper and reads it.)

(ELIS at first standing restlessly, then walking up and down.)

MRS. HEYST. What's this? . . . Didn't I say that among other things there was a yellow tulip stolen from the flower shop?

ELIS. Yes, I remember it quite distinctly!

MRS. HEYST. But here it says . . . a daffodil!

ELIS *(frightened)*. Does it say that?

MRS. HEYST *(sinks down in a chair)*. It's Eleonora! Oh, my God! my God!

ELIS. Then that was not all?

MRS. HEYST. Prison or the asylum!

ELIS. It's impossible that she did it! Impossible!

MRS. HEYST. And now our name will be public again and dishonoured.

ELIS. Do they suspect her?

MRS. HEYST. It says that suspicion has been aroused in certain places . . . against . . . it is quite clear whom.

E A S T E R

ELIS. I'll talk to her!

MRS. HEYST (*rises*). Talk kindly! For I can't stand any more. . . . She is lost . . . found and lost . . . talk to her!

(*Goes out to the right.*)

ELIS. Oh! (*Goes to the left door.*) Elconora! my child, come and let me talk to you!

ELEONORA (*comes out, with her hair all undone*). I was just putting up my hair!

ELIS. Never mind that! . . . Tell me, little sister, where did you get that flower?

ELEONORA. I took it . . .

ELIS. Oh, my God!

ELEONORA (*with bowed head, crushed, with her arms crossed on her breast*). But I put the money on the counter. . . .

ELIS. So you paid for it?

ELEONORA. Yes and no! It is always so distressing . . . but I haven't done anything wrong . . . I only meant well . . . don't you believe me?

ELIS. I believe you, dear sister, but the paper doesn't know that you are innocent!

ELEONORA. Oh, dear, so I must suffer that too. . . . (*She bows her head, so that her hair falls down in front.*) What will they do with me now? Well, let them!

BENJAMIN (*enters from the left, beside himself*). No, you mustn't touch her, because she has done no wrong. I know it, for it was I, I, I – (*weeps*) – who did it!

ELEONORA. Don't believe what he says. . . . It was I!

ELIS. What shall I believe; whom shall I believe?

BENJAMIN. Me, me!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

ELEONORA. Me, me!

BENJAMIN. Let me go to the police.

ELIS. Hush! hush!

BENJAMIN. No, I will go. I will go!

ELIS. Be quiet, children, mother is coming!

MRS. HEYST (*enters greatly excited, takes ELEONORA in her arms and kisses her*). My child, my child, my beloved child! You are with me and you shall stay with me!

ELEONORA. You kiss me, Mother? You've not done that for many a year. And why only now?

MRS. HEYST. Because just now . . . because the owner of the flower shop is outside and asks pardon for having caused so much annoyance . . . the lost money has been found and your name. . . .

ELEONORA (*leaps into ELIS's arms and kisses him; then she puts her arms round BENJAMIN's neck and kisses him on the brow*). Good child, who would suffer for me! How could you want to do it?

BENJAMIN (*shyly and childishly*). Because I am so very fond of you, Eleonora!

MRS. HEYST. Put on your things, children, and go out into the garden! It's clearing up!

ELEONORA. Ah! It's clearing up! Come along, Benjamin! (*She takes his hand and they go out to the left, hand in hand.*)

ELIS. May we soon throw the birch on the fire.

MRS. HEYST. Not yet! There is still something left.

ELIS. Lindkvist?

MRS. HEYST. He is outside! But he is very strange and curiously gentle; it's only a pity he is so wordy and talks so much about himself.

E A S T E R

ELIS. Well, now that I have seen a sunbeam, I am not afraid to meet the giant. Let him come!

MRS. HEYST. But don't irritate him. . . . Providence has placed your fate in his hands and the meek . . . you know where the arrogant go!

ELIS. I know . . . listen, his galoshes . . . swish! swish! swish! Does he mean to come in with them on? But why not? These are his carpets and his furniture. . . .

MRS. HEYST. Elis! Think of us all! (*Goes to the right.*)

ELIS. I do, Mother!

LINDKVIST (*enters from the right. He is an elderly, serious man who looks grim. He has grey hair, with a forelock, brushed forward over the ears. Large, black, bushy eyebrows. Small, black, short whiskers. Spectacles with black horn rims and circular glasses. Large cornelian charms on his watch-chain; a cane in his hand. He is dressed in black, with a fur coat, and carries a tall hat. Top-boots and leather galoshes which squelch. As he enters he fixes ELIS with a curious glance and remains standing all the time.*). My name is Lindkvist!

ELIS (*on the defensive*). Mine is Heyst. . . . Please take a scat!

(LINDKVIST sits down on the chair to the right of the sewing-table and looks at ELIS steadily.)

(*Pause.*)

ELIS. What can I do for you?

LINDKVIST (*solemnly*). Hm! — I had the honour last night of announcing my intended visit; but on second thoughts I found it not quite fitting to discuss business on a holy day.

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

ELIS. We are much obliged. . . .

LINDEKVIST (*sharply*). We are not obliged! Yes! (*Pause.*) However, the day before yesterday I happened to call on the Lord-Lieutenant . . . (*Pauses to see what impression his words make on ELIS*) . . . do you know the Lord-Lieutenant?

ELIS (*carelessly*). I have not the honour!

LINDEKVIST. Then you shall have the honour! . . . We talked of your father!

ELIS. I daresay!

LINDEKVIST (*takes out a piece of paper and lays it on the table*). And I got this paper from him!

ELIS. I have expected it for a long time! But before we go any further, I will ask permission to put a question!

LINDEKVIST (*curtly*). By all means!

ELIS. Why don't you take this paper to the official receiver, so that we may at least be spared this slow and painful execution.

LINDEKVIST. Oh! that's it, young man!

ELIS. Young or not, I ask no mercy, but only justice!

LINDEKVIST. Oh, that's it! no mercy, no mercy! — Just look at the paper which I lay on the edge of the table, here! Now I put it back in my pocket! . . . justice, you said! Nothing but justice! Now listen, my dear fellow; once upon a time I was robbed, robbed of my money in an unpleasant way! When I wrote you a good-natured letter and asked how much respite you required, you answered me rudely! You treated me as if I were a usurer, who would plunder widows and fatherless children, though it was I myself who

E A S T E R

had been plundered, and you were one of the robbers. But as I had more sense, I contented myself with replying civilly but sharply to your rude abuse! You know my blue paper, eh? I can have it stamped whenever I like, but I don't always happen to like! (*Looks round the room.*)

ELIS. If you please! the furniture is at your disposal!

LINDKVIST. I wasn't looking at the furniture! I was looking whether your mother was here! I suppose she loves justice just as much as you do!

ELIS. I hope so!

LINDKVIST. Good! . . . Do you know that if the justice which you appear to esteem so highly had had its course, your mother, as an accomplice, might also have met with justice!

ELIS. Surely not!

LINDKVIST. Yes, and it's not too late even now!

ELIS (*rises*). My mother!

LINDKVIST (*takes out another blue paper and lays it on the table*). Look! Now I place this paper on the edge of the table, and this is really blue . . . but it is not stamped yet!

ELIS. God Almighty! my mother! everything comes back!

LINDKVIST. Yes, my young lover of justice, everything comes back, everything! . . . such things do happen! . . . If I should now put this question to myself: 'You, Anders Johan Lindkvist, born in poverty and brought up in privation and toil, is it right that you in your old age should deprive yourself and your children, note well, *your children*, of the support which by industry, foresight and self-denial, mark well, *self-denial*, you

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

have saved up, farthing by farthing? What would you do, Anders Johan Lindkvist, if you are to be just? You robbed nobody, but if you dislike being robbed, you can no longer live in a town, for nobody will have anything to do with the hard-hearted man who demands his own back.' So you see that there is a charity which runs contrary to the law and is above it . . . it is mercy!

ELIS. You are right, take everything! It belongs to you!

LINDKVIST. I have the right, but I dare not exercise it!

ELIS. I shall think of your children and not complain!

LINDKVIST (*puts back the paper*). Good! Then we'll put back the blue paper once more! . . . Now we will go a step further.

ELIS. Excuse me. . . . Do they really mean to prosecute my mother?

LINDKVIST. Let's go a step further first. . . . So you don't know the Lord-Lieutenant personally?

ELIS. No, and I don't want to!

LINDKVIST (*takes out the blue paper again and waves it*). Come! come! . . . The Lord-Lieutenant, you see, was a friend of your father's in childhood, and he wants to make your acquaintance! Everything comes back to us, everything! Won't you pay him a visit?

ELIS. No!

LINDKVIST. The Lord-Lieutenant . . .

ELIS. Mayn't we talk of something else?

LINDKVIST. You must be polite to me, for I am defenceless . . . because you have public opinion on your side, and I only justice. What have you against the

E A S T E R

Lord-Lieutenant? He doesn't like bicycles and people's high schools; that is a little peculiarity of his. We need not exactly respect the peculiarities, but let us pass them over, pass them over, and keep to essentials, as man to man! And in the great crises of life we must take each other as we are, with all our faults and weaknesses; swallow each other neck and crop! . . . You go to the Lord-Lieutenant!

ELIS. Never!

LINDKVIST. Is that the sort of man you are?

ELIS (*firmly*). Yes, that sort!

LINDKVIST (*rises and begins to walk about the room with his creaking boots, waving the blue paper*). Worse, worse still! . . . Good, then I will try another side. . . . A revengeful person intends to bring a charge against your mother. That you can prevent!

ELIS. How?

LINDKVIST. By going to the Lord-Lieutenant!

ELIS. No!

LINDKVIST (*goes to ELIS and seizes him by the shoulders*). Then you are the vilest creature I have ever met in my life! . . . I will go to your mother myself!

ELIS. Don't!

LINDKVIST. Will you go to the Lord-Lieutenant?

ELIS. Yes!

LINDKVIST. Say that once more, and louder!

ELIS. Yes!

LINDKVIST. Then that's settled! (*Lays down the blue paper.*) There is the paper!

(*ELIS takes the paper without reading it.*)

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

LINDKVIST. Now comes number two, which *was* number one! . . . Shall we sit down? . . . (*They sit down as before.*) You see, if only we go to meet each other, the road will be shortened by half! . . . No. 2! . . . my claim to your house! No! no illusions, for I neither can nor will give away the property of my family! I will extort my claim to the last farthing.

ELIS. That I understand!

LINDKVIST (*sharply*). Oh, indeed! you do understand that?

ELIS. I did not mean to be offensive. . . .

LINDKVIST. No, I realize that. (*Raises his spectacles and looks at ELIS.*) Beast, angry beast! lash, lash! . . . and the flesh-coloured cornelian; the giant from the Skinnarviksberg who doesn't eat children, only frightens them! I will frighten you, I will, until you are out of your wits, I will! I'll have the value of every stick of furniture. . . . I have the inventory in my pocket, and if a single stick is missing you will be clapped into jail where neither the sun nor Cassiopea shines! Yes, I can eat up children and widows, when I am provoked – and public opinion? Bah! as to that, I'll simply move to another town.

(*ELIS mute.*)

You had a friend, named Peter, Peter Holmblad. He was a language-fellow and your pupil in languages. But you wanted to make a kind of prophet out of him. . . . Very well, he was disloyal; the cock crew twice, didn't it?

(*ELIS silent.*)

E A S T E R

Human nature is unreliable, just like things and thoughts. Peter *was* faithless, I don't deny it, and I don't defend him . . . on that point! But the human heart is fathomless, and gold and dross lie mixed together in it! Peter was a faithless friend to you, but nevertheless a friend!

ELIS. A faithless . . .

LINDKVIST. Faithless, yes, but nevertheless a friend! This faithless friend, unknown to you, has done you a great service.

ELIS. That too!

LINDKVIST (*moves nearer to ELIS*). Everything comes back to us, everything!

ELIS. Everything evil, yes! And the good is rewarded with evil!

LINDKVIST. Not always; good also comes back! Believe me!

ELIS. I suppose I must, else you'll torture the life out of me!

LINDKVIST. Not life, but pride and evil I will squeeze out of you!

ELIS. Go on!

LINDKVIST. I said that Peter had done you a service!

ELIS. I don't want to accept any service from the fellow!

LINDKVIST. Are we back at that again, now just listen! By the intervention of your friend Peter the Lord-Lieutenant was induced to intercede for your mother! Consequently you must write a letter to Peter and thank him! Promise me that.

ELIS. No! To anybody else in the world, but not to him!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

LINDKVIST (*suddenly comes nearer*). I suppose I shall have to squeeze you again, as . . . Listen, you have some money in the bank, haven't you?

ELIS. Well, what has that to do with you? I am not responsible for my father's debts, I suppose?

LINDKVIST. Aren't you! Aren't you! Weren't you there eating and drinking when my children's money was being lavished in this house? Answer?

ELIS. I can't deny it!

LINDKVIST. And since the furniture does not suffice to pay the debt, you will at once make out a cheque for the balance – you know the amount.

ELIS (*annihilated*). That too?

LINDKVIST. That too! Please write it out!

(*ELIS rises, takes out his cheque-book and writes at the writing-table.*)

LINDKVIST. Make it out to yourself or order!

ELIS. It won't be enough anyhow!

LINDKVIST. Then you must go and borrow the balance! . . . every farthing of it!

ELIS (*hands the cheque to LINDKVIST*). Here, this is all I possess! It is my summer and my bride. I have no more to give!

LINDKVIST. Then you must go and borrow, I say!

ELIS. I can't!

LINDKVIST. Then you must find a surety!

ELIS. No one will go surety for a Heyst!

c. LINDKVIST. Then as an ultimatum I will put before you two alternatives: Thank Peter, or pay up the amount!

E A S T E R

ELIS. I won't have anything to do with Peter.

LINDKVIST. Then you are the vilest creature I know! By a simple act of politeness, you can save your mother's home and the future of your fiancée, and you will not do it! There must be some motive you won't disclose! Why do you hate Peter?

ELIS. Kill me, but do not go on torturing me!

LINDKVIST. You are jealous of him!

(ELIS shrugs his shoulders.)

So that's how things stand! . . . (*Rises and walks up and down. Pause.*) Have you read the morning paper?

ELIS. Yes, unfortunately!

LINDKVIST. All of it?

ELIS. No, not all!

LINDKVIST. Indeed? Then you don't know that Peter is engaged?

ELIS. That I didn't know!

LINDKVIST. Nor to whom? Guess!

ELIS. How . . .

LINDKVIST. He is engaged to Miss Alice, and it was arranged last night at a certain concert, at which your fiancée acted as mediator!

ELIS. Then why all this secrecy?

LINDKVIST. Haven't two young people the right to keep the secrets of their hearts from you?

ELIS. And I had to suffer this torture for their happiness?

LINDKVIST. Yes! For those who suffered that you might be happy! Your mother, your father, your

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

sweetheart, your sister . . . sit down and I'll tell you a story, a very short one!

(ELIS sits down reluctantly. During the preceding and the succeeding scene the weather clears outside.)

LINDKVIST. It happened about forty years ago! I came to the capital as a boy, alone, unknown and knowing no one, to seek employment. I had only one krona and it was a dark night. As I didn't know of a cheap hotel I asked passers-by; but nobody answered me. When I was in the depths of despair a man came and asked me why I cried! – for I was crying. I told him of my distress! Then he retraced his steps, accompanied me to an hotel and comforted me with kind words. As I passed through the entrance hall the glass door of a shop was flung open and hit my elbow and the glass was broken. The angry shopkeeper stopped me and demanded payment, threatening to call in the police. Imagine my despair with a night on the streets in prospect! – The kindly unknown, who had seen the whole thing, intervened, took the trouble of calling in the police and saved me! . . . That man – was your father! . . . Thus everything comes back to us, good things as well. And for your father's sake . . . I have wiped out my claim! . . . So . . . take this paper and keep your cheque! *(Rises.)* As you seem to find difficulty in saying 'thank you' I will go at once, especially as I find it painful to be thanked! *(Approaching the door in the background.)* Now go at once to your mother and free her from her anxiety! *(Waves him back as ELIS seeks to approach him.)* Go!

E A S T E R

(*ELIS hastens out to the right.*)

(*The doors in the background open. ELEONORA and BENJAMIN enter, calm but serious. They stop, alarmed as they see LINDKVIST.*)

LINDKVIST. Well, little people, come in and don't be afraid. . . . Do you know who I am? . . . (*in a disguised voice*). I am the giant from the Skinnarviksberg, who frightens little children! Ooh! ooh! But I am not very dangerous! — Come here, Eleonora! (*Takes her head in his hands and looks into her eyes.*) You have your father's kind eyes, and he was a good man — though weak. (*Kisses her on the forehead.*) So there!

ELEONORA. Oh! he speaks well of father! Can anybody think well of him?

LINDKVIST. I can! Ask your brother Elis!

ELEONORA. Then you can't wish us any harm!

LINDKVIST. No, my dearest child!

ELEONORA. Well, help us then!

LINDKVIST. Child, I can't help your father to escape his punishment or help Benjamin through his Latin examination. . . . But I have brought help in all else. You can't get everything in life, and you can get nothing for nothing. So you must help me, will you?

ELEONORA. What can I do, me, a poor little thing?

LINDKVIST. What date is it to-day? Look it up!

ELEONORA (*takes the calendar from the wall*). It is the 16th!

LINDKVIST. Well! before the 20th you must have made your brother Elis call on the Lord-Lieutenant and write a letter to Peter.

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

ELEONORA. Is that all?

LINDKVIST. Oh! child! But if he doesn't do it, the giant will come and say, Ooh!

ELEONORA. *Why* does the giant come and frighten children?

LINDKVIST. To make the children good!

ELEONORA. That's true! The giant is right! (*Kisses the sleeve of LINDKVIST's fur coat.*) Thanks! good giant!

BENJAMIN. You must say 'Mr. Lindkvist,' you know!

ELEONORA. No, it's so ordinary, that name. . . .

LINDKVIST. Good-bye to you, children! Now you can throw the birch on the fire!

ELEONORA. No, it shall remain where it is, lest the children forget.

LINDKVIST. How well you know children, little one. (*Goes out.*)

ELEONORA. We can go to the country, Benjamin, in two months! Oh, if they would only pass quickly! (*Tears off the sheets of the calendar and throws them into the sunlight, which streams into the room.*) See how the days pass! April! May! June! And the sun shines on all of them! Look! . . . Now you must thank God, for He has helped us to get to the country!

BENJAMIN (*shyly*). May I not say it without words?

ELEONORA. Yes, you may say it without words, for now the clouds are gone and it will be heard above!

(*KRISTINA has entered from the left and stands still. ELIS and MRS. HEYST enter from the right. KRISTINA and ELIS approach each other affectionately, but the curtain falls before they meet.*)

THE DANCE OF DEATH
PART I

★

Written 1901

Translated by

C. D. LOGCOCK

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

PART I

EDGAR, Captain in the Garrison Artillery.

ALICE, his wife, formerly an actress.

KURT, Quarantine Officer.

Minor Characters

JENNY.

AN OLD WOMAN.

A SENTRY (non-speaking part).

PART II

EDGAR.

ALICE.

KURT.

ALLAN, Kurt's son.

JUDITH, Edgar's daughter.

THE LIEUTENANT.

PART I

SCENE: *The interior of a circular fort of grey stone.*

In the background two large gates with glass doors, showing a sea-coast with batteries and the sea.

On each side of the gateway a window with flower-pots and bird-cages. To the right of the door a cottage piano; further down the stage a sewing-table and two armchairs.

To the left, in the middle of the stage, a writing-table with telegraph apparatus: further forward a what-not containing photographs, and close to it a couch. Against the wall a sideboard.

A lamp hangs from the ceiling. On the wall by the piano hang two large laurel-wreaths with ribbons, one on each side of the portrait of a woman in theatrical costume.

By the door a hat-stand on which accoutrements, swords, etc., are hanging; near it a chiffonier.

To the left of the door hangs a mercurial barometer.

It is a warm autumn evening. The fortress gates are open, and one can see an artilleryman on sentry duty out by the shore battery. He wears a kind of bushy, and his sword glitters now and then in the red glow of the setting sun. The sea is dark and still.

The CAPTAIN is sitting in the arm-chair to the left of the sewing-table, fingering a cigar which has gone out. He is wearing an undress uniform, rather the worse for wear, with riding-boots and spurs. Looks tired and bored.

ALICE is sitting in the arm-chair on the right, doing nothing. Looks tired and expectant.

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

CAPTAIN. Won't you play to me a little?

ALICE (*indifferently, but not pettishly*). What shall I play?

CAPTAIN. Whatever *you* like!

ALICE. You don't like my repertoire!

CAPTAIN. Nor you mine!

ALICE (*evasively*). Do you want the doors left open?

CAPTAIN. If you wish it!

ALICE. We'll leave them then. . . . (*A pause.*) Why aren't you smoking?

CAPTAIN. I'm beginning to find strong tobacco rather too much for me.

ALICE (*almost in a friendly tone*). Smoke something milder then! Why, it's your only joy, as you call it.

CAPTAIN. Joy! What may that be?

ALICE. Don't ask me! I know as little about it as you do! . . . Won't you have your whisky now?

CAPTAIN. I'll wait a little! . . . What have you got for supper?

ALICE. How should I know? Ask Kristin!

CAPTAIN. Oughtn't mackerel to be in soon? Why, it's autumn now!

ALICE. Yes, it's autumn!

CAPTAIN. Outside and in! But apart from the cold, outside and in, that comes with autumn, a broiled mackerel, with a slice of lemon, and a glass of white Burgundy, is not altogether to be despised!

ALICE. You're getting quite eloquent!

CAPTAIN. Is there any Burgundy left in the cellar?

ALICE. I'm not aware that we've *had* any cellar these last five years. . . .

THE DANCE OF DEATH

CAPTAIN. You never do know anything. However, we *must* get in a supply for our silver wedding. . . .

ALICE. Do you really mean to celebrate that?

CAPTAIN. Naturally!

ALICE. It would be more natural to hide our misery, our twenty-five years of misery. . . .

CAPTAIN. Yes, dear Alice, it has been misery, but rather jolly too, now and then! One must make use of what little time there is: after that comes the end!

ALICE. Is it the end? If only it were!

CAPTAIN. It *is* the end! Just enough left to wheel out on a barrow and put on a garden bed!

ALICE. And all that trouble for the sake of a garden bed!

CAPTAIN. Yes, that's how it is; *I* didn't arrange it!

ALICE. All that trouble! (*A pause.*) Have you had your letters?

CAPTAIN. Yes!

ALICE. Was the butcher's bill among them?

CAPTAIN. Yes!

ALICE. How much was it?

CAPTAIN (*takes a paper out of his pocket and puts on his glasses, but takes them off again at once*). Read it yourself! I can't see now. . . .

ALICE. What's wrong with your eyes?

CAPTAIN. Don't know!

ALICE. Old age.

CAPTAIN. What nonsense! Me!

ALICE. Yes, not me!

CAPTAIN. Hm!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

ALICE (*looks at the bill*). Can you pay this?

CAPTAIN. Yes! but not at the moment!

ALICE. Later on of course! In a year, when you're retired with a small pension and it's too late! Later on, when you get ill again. . . .

CAPTAIN. Ill? I have never been ill: just a little out of sorts once. I shall live another twenty years yet!

ALICE. The doctor thought otherwise!

CAPTAIN. The doctor!

ALICE. Yes: who else would be likely to know anything about an illness?

CAPTAIN. I haven't any illness, and never have had. Nor shall I. I shall go off bang! like an old soldier!

ALICE. Talking of the doctor, you know they're having a party there this evening.

CAPTAIN (*agitated*). Yes, and what of it? We're not invited because we don't associate with the doctor's family, and we don't do so because we don't want to — because I despise the pair of them. Rabble, that's what they are!

ALICE. That's what you say about everybody!

CAPTAIN. Because everybody is rabble!

ALICE. Except you!

CAPTAIN. Yes, because I have behaved decently in all circumstances. That's why I'm not rabble! (*A pause.*)

ALICE. Would you like to play cards?

CAPTAIN. All right!

ALICE (*takes a pack of cards from the sewing-table drawer and begins to shuffle*). Just fancy, they're having the band at the Doctor's for a private entertainment!

THE DANCE OF DEATH

CAPTAIN (*angrily*). That's because he truckles to the Colonel in the town! truckles – that's what it is! – If one could only do that!

ALICE (*dealing*). At one time I was a friend of Gerda's, but she played me false. . . .

CAPTAIN. They're all false, the whole lot of them! . . . What's that trump over there?

ALICE. Take your glasses!

CAPTAIN. They're no use! . . . Well, well!

ALICE. Spades are trumps!

CAPTAIN (*disappointed*). Spades? . . .

ALICE (*leads*). Well, however that may be, so far as the new officers' wives are concerned we're on the black list in any case!

CAPTAIN (*plays and takes the trick*). What does that matter? We never 'give any parties, so it won't be noticed! I can put up with being alone . . . I have always been so!

ALICE. And I too! But the children! the children are growing up without any companionship!

CAPTAIN. They must find that for themselves in the town! . . . That was my trick! Any trumps left?

ALICE. Just one! – That was mine!

CAPTAIN. Six and eight are fifteen. . . .

ALICE. Fourteen, fourteen!

CAPTAIN. Six and eight makes me fourteen. . . . I seem to have forgotten how to count! And two is sixteen. . . . (*Tawns.*) Your deal!

ALICE. You're tired!

CAPTAIN (*dealing*). Not in the least!

ALICE (*listening to sounds outside*). One can hear the

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

band even here! (*A pause.*) Do you think Kurt was asked there?

CAPTAIN. He arrived this morning, so I expect he has found time to get out his dress clothes, though not to call on us!

ALICE. Quarantine officer! Is there to be a quarantine station here?

CAPTAIN. Yes! . . .

ALICE. After all, he is my cousin – we once had the same name. . . .

CAPTAIN. No great honour in that!

ALICE. Look here, now! . . . (*Sharply.*) Leave my family alone, and I'll leave yours!

CAPTAIN. All right, all right! Must we start that all over again?

ALICE. Is the quarantine officer a doctor?

CAPTAIN. Oh, dear no! Merely a sort of civilian manager or book-keeper. Kurt, as you know, was never anything!

ALICE. He was a poor sort of creature. . . .

CAPTAIN. Who has cost me a lot of money. . . . And the way he left his wife and children – simply infamous!

ALICE. Don't be too hard on him, Edgar!

CAPTAIN. Yes, that's what he was! . . . I wonder what he's been doing since in America! Well, I can't say I'm longing for him! But he was a nice sort of fellow, and I used to like arguing with him.

ALICE. Because he was so accommodating. . . .

CAPTAIN (*loftily*). Accommodating or not, he was at least a man one could talk to. . . . On this island here

THE DANCE OF DEATH

there isn't one single person who can understand what I say . . . it's a society of idiots. . . .

ALICE. It's curious, isn't it, Kurt's coming just in time for our silver wedding – whether we celebrate it or not?

CAPTAIN. Why curious? . . . Oh yes, I see! It was he who brought us together – got you married – so they said!

ALICE. Well, didn't he!

CAPTAIN. Of course he did! . . . Just an idea of his.

. . . Well, you can judge for yourself!

ALICE. A thoughtless whim. . . .

CAPTAIN. For which we've had to pay – not he!

ALICE. Yes, only think if I'd still been on the stage! All my friends are celebrities now!

CAPTAIN (*getting up*). Quite so, quite so! . . . Well, I'll have my whisky now! (*Goes to the sideboard and mixes a drink, which he takes standing.*) There ought to be a rail here to put one's feet on; then one could imagine oneself in Copenhagen, in the American bar!

ALICE. We must have a rail made, if only to remind us of Copenhagen. After all that was the best time we ever had!

CAPTAIN (*drinks eagerly*). Yes. Do you remember Nimb's *navarin aux pommes*? (*Smacks his lips.*)

ALICE. No, but I remember the concerts at the Tivoli!

CAPTAIN. You've got such exalted tastes, you have!

ALICE. You ought to be proud of having a wife with good taste!

CAPTAIN. So I am!

ALICE. Sometimes, when you want to show her off!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

CAPTAIN (*drinking*). They must be dancing at the Doctor's . . . I can hear the bass tubas' three-four time: pom – pom-pom!

ALICE. I can hear the whole tune of the Alcazar Waltz. Ah well, it wasn't yesterday – the last time I danced a waltz!

CAPTAIN. Could you still manage it?

ALICE. Still?

CAPTAIN. Ye-es! I should have thought you were past dancing now – both of us!

ALICE. But I'm ten years younger than you!

CAPTAIN. In that case we must be the same age: the lady is always supposed to be ten years younger!

ALICE. For shame! Why you're an old man: I am still in my best years!

CAPTAIN. Oh yes, I know you can be charming enough to other people – when you give your mind to it.

ALICE. Shall we have the lamp lighted now?

CAPTAIN. If you like!

ALICE. Will you ring then?

(*The CAPTAIN goes wearily to the writing-table and rings the bell.*

Enter JENNY from the right.)

CAPTAIN. Would you be so kind as to light the lamp, Jenny?

ALICE (*sharply*). Light the hanging lamp!

JENNY. Yes, ma'am. (*Lights the lamp while the CAPTAIN watches her.*)

ALICE (*curtly*). Have you cleaned the chimney properly?

THE DANCE OF DEATH

JENNY. Rather!

ALICE. Do you call that a proper answer?

CAPTAIN. Now, now —

ALICE (*to JENNY*). Leave the room! I will light the lamp myself. I suppose that's the only thing to do!

JENNY (*going*). I think so too!

ALICE (*getting up*). Go!

JENNY (*stopping*). I wonder what you'd say if I did go, ma'am! (*ALICE says nothing. JENNY goes out. The CAPTAIN comes forward and lights the lamp.*)

ALICE (*uneasily*). Do you think she'll leave?

CAPTAIN. Shouldn't be surprised! If so, we're in a nice mess!

ALICE. It's your fault. You spoil them!

CAPTAIN. Not at all! You can see how polite they always are to me!

ALICE. That's because you cringe to them! The fact is you cringe to all your inferiors, because, despot as you are, you have a slavish nature.

CAPTAIN. Oh, come!

ALICE. Yes, you cringe to your men and your N.C.O.s, but you can't get on with your equals or your superiors.

CAPTAIN. Ouf!

ALICE. That's the way with all tyrants! . . . Do you think she'll leave?

CAPTAIN. Yes, unless you go out and speak nicely to her!

ALICE. I?

CAPTAIN. If I did, you'd say I was flirting with the maids!

ALICE. Only think — if she does go! I should have to

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

do all the work, the same as last time, and ruin my hands!

CAPTAIN. That's not the worst! If Jenny goes, Kristin goes too, and we shall never get a servant to come to the island again! The mate on the steamboat scares away all the new arrivals who come to apply for the place. . . . If he forgets, then my corporals see to it!

ALICE. Yes, your corporals! whom I have to feed in my kitchen, because you don't dare show them the door. . . .

CAPTAIN. No; if I did, they'd leave too as soon as their time was up . . . then we'd have to shut up the gunshop!

ALICE. Well, we shall be ruined!

CAPTAIN. That's why the officers are thinking of asking His Majesty for a maintenance subsidy. . . .

ALICE. Who for?

CAPTAIN. For the corporals!

ALICE (*laughing*). You're too mad!

CAPTAIN. Yes, let me hear you laugh a little! I may need it.

ALICE. I shall soon have forgotten how to laugh. . . .

CAPTAIN (*lighting his cigar*). That's a thing one should never forget . . . life is tedious enough anyhow!

ALICE. It is certainly not amusing! . . . Do you care to play any more?

CAPTAIN. No, it tires me. (*A pause.*)

ALICE. You know it does somehow annoy me to think that my cousin, the new quarantine officer's first visit should be to our enemies!

CAPTAIN. Hardly worth talking about, is it?

THE DANCE OF DEATH

ALICE. Well, but did you see in the papers that he was put down in the list of arrivals as of independent means? He must have come into some money!

CAPTAIN. Of independent means! oho! a rich relation! Certainly the first in this family!

ALICE. In your family, yes! There've been plenty in mine.

CAPTAIN. If he has money he's probably stuck-up; but I'll keep him in check! and he shan't get a chance of seeing my cards! (*Clicking from the telegraph receiver.*)

ALICE. Who is it?

CAPTAIN (*without moving*). Quiet – one moment!

ALICE. Why don't you go and see?

CAPTAIN. I can hear: I can hear what they're saying! It's the children!

(*Goes to the apparatus and taps out a reply. After that the receiver goes on clicking for a time and then the CAPTAIN replies again.*)

ALICE. Well?

CAPTAIN. One moment! (*Switches off.*) It's the children, at the guard-house in the town. Judith isn't well again and is staying away from school.

ALICE. Again! what else did they say?

CAPTAIN. Money, of course!

ALICE. Why need Judith be in such a hurry? It would be quite soon enough if she took her examination next year!

CAPTAIN. Tell her so and see what good it does!

ALICE. You ought to tell her!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

CAPTAIN. How many times haven't I told her! But you know quite well, children do what they like!

ALICE. In this house at any rate! . . . (*The CAPTAIN yawns.*) Must you yawn in the presence of your wife?

CAPTAIN. What is one to do? . . . Don't you notice how we say the same things every blessed day? When you came out just now with your good old retort, 'In this house at any rate,' I ought to have replied with my ancient 'It's not *my* house only.' But since I have already given this answer five hundred times, I yawn instead. So you can take my yawn to mean, either that I can't be bothered to answer, or: 'You are right, my angel,' or 'Now let's stop!'

ALICE. You're very amiable this evening!

CAPTAIN. Isn't it nearly time for supper?

ALICE. Did you know they had ordered supper from the Grand Hotel for the Doctor's party?

CAPTAIN. No! Then they'll be having ptarmigan. (*Smacks his lips.*) Ptarmigan, you know, is the finest bird there is, but to roast it with pork-fat is sheer barbarism. . . .

ALICE. Ugh! Talking about food!

CAPTAIN. About wine then? I wonder what those barbarians would have with their ptarmigan?

ALICE. Shall I play to you?

CAPTAIN (*seats himself at the writing-table*). The last resource! Yes, if you'll leave out your funeral marches and dirges . . . they sound like music with a purpose. I keep on interpolating - 'See how unhappy I am! miaow, miaow!' Or 'See what a terrible husband I have! Pom, pom, pom! Oh, if he would only die soon!

THE DANCE OF DEATH

Bangs from the joyful drums, fanfares: ending up with the Alcazar Waltz! Champagne Galop!' Apropos of champagne, there must be at least two bottles left. Shall we have them up and pretend we've got a party?

ALICE. No, that we won't! They're mine – a present to me personally!

CAPTAIN. You are always economical!

ALICE. And you're always stingy, to your wife at any rate!

CAPTAIN. Then I don't know what to suggest. Would you like to see me dance?

ALICE. No, thank you! You are past dancing, I fancy.

CAPTAIN. You ought to have some woman friend to stay with you!

ALICE. Thanks! you ought to have some man to stay with you!

CAPTAIN. Thanks! we have tried that – and agreed that it was a complete failure! As an experiment it was interesting: the moment we had another person in the house we became quite happy . . . to begin with. . . .

ALICE. But afterwards!

CAPTAIN. Oh, don't talk of it! (*Knocking heard at the door, left.*)

ALICE. Who can it be, so late as this?

CAPTAIN. Jenny doesn't usually knock.

ALICE. Go and open the door, and don't call out 'Come in!' It sounds like a workshop!

CAPTAIN (*going towards the door, left*). You don't like workshops! (*Another knock.*)

ALICE. Do open the door!

CAPTAIN (*opens the door and takes a visiting-card which is*

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

handed to him). It's Kristin. — Has Jenny left? (*To ALICE, since the answer is not heard by the audience.*) Jenny has left!

ALICE. Then I've to be a servant-girl again!

CAPTAIN. And I the man!

ALICE. Couldn't we get one of your men to help in the kitchen?

CAPTAIN. Not in these days!

ALICE. But surely it couldn't be Jenny, sending in her card like that?

CAPTAIN (*examines the card through his glasses and then hands it to ALICE*). You read it — I can't!

ALICE (*looks at the card*). Kurt! it's Kurt! Go out and bring him in!

CAPTAIN (*goes out left*). Kurt! well, this is delightful!

(*ALICE arranges her hair and seems to come to life again.*)

★

CAPTAIN (*comes in from the left with KURT*). Here he is — the old traitor! Welcome, old man! I'd like to hug you!

ALICE (*going towards KURT*). Delighted to see you, Kurt!

KURT. Thank you! . . . It's a long time since we met!

CAPTAIN. What is it? fifteen years! And we've grown old. . . .

ALICE. Oh, Kurt looks just the same to me.

CAPTAIN. Sit down, sit down! — And first of all — the programme! any engagement for this evening?

KURT. I've been asked to the Doctor's, but I didn't promise to go!

ALICE. Then you must stay with your relations!

THE DANCE OF DEATH

KURT. That seems the natural thing to do, but the Doctor is my superior in a way, and there'll be trouble afterwards!

CAPTAIN. What nonsense! I've never been afraid of my superiors . . .

KURT. Afraid or not – the trouble's there all the same!

CAPTAIN. I am master on this island! Keep behind me and nobody will dare touch you!

ALICE. Do be quiet, Edgar! (*Takes KURT by the hand.*) Masters and superiors or not, you stay here with us. That's the right and proper thing to do!

KURT. All right then! – especially as I think I'm welcome.

CAPTAIN. And why shouldn't you be? surely there's no ill-feeling. . . . (*KURT cannot conceal a certain embarrassment.*) What could there be? You used to be a bit of a rascal: but you were young and I have forgotten that! I'm not one to cherish old grudges! (*ALICE looks annoyed. All three sit down at the sewing-table.*)

ALICE. Well, you've been about the world a bit?

KURT. Yes, and now I find myself back again with you. . . .

CAPTAIN. Whom you married off twenty-five years ago.

KURT. Oh, hardly that! but that doesn't matter. I'm glad to see you have stuck together for twenty-five years. . . .

CAPTAIN. Yes, we've worried along! at times things have been rather so-so: still, as you say, we've stuck together. And Alice has had nothing to complain of:

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

plenty of everything and heaps of money. I daresay you don't know I'm a famous author, writer of textbooks. . . .

KURT. Yes, I remember, when we went our different ways, you'd just published a manual on rifle-shooting that sold well. Is it still used in the military schools?

CAPTAIN. It's still to be found there, and keeps its place as number one, though they've tried to shelve it in favour of an inferior one . . . which is certainly in use now, though utterly worthless! (*Embarrassing silence.*)

KURT. You've been travelling abroad, I hear.

ALICE. Yes, we've been to Copenhagen five times – just fancy!

CAPTAIN. Yes, you see when I took Alice away from the theatre . . .

ALICE. Took me?

CAPTAIN. Yes, took you as a wife should be taken. . . .

ALICE. How brave you have grown!

CAPTAIN. But afterwards, as I never heard the last about my ruining her brilliant career – hm! . . . I had to make up for it by promising to take my wife to Copenhagen. . . . And this I have kept to – honourably! Five times we've been there! five! (*Holding up the fingers of his left hand.*) Have you been to Copenhagen?

KURT (*smiling*). No, I've mostly been in America. . . .

CAPTAIN. America? Isn't that rather an outlandish sort of place?

KURT (*embarrassed*). Well, it isn't Copenhagen!

ALICE. Have you – heard anything – from your children?

KURT. No!

THE DANCE OF DEATH

ALICE. Forgive me, dear friend, but it really was rather inconsiderate to leave them like that. . . .

KURT. I didn't leave them: the Court gave them to the mother. . . .

CAPTAIN. We won't talk about that now! I think you were lucky to get out of that mess!

KURT (*to ALICE*). How are your children?

ALICE. Quite well, thank you! They're at school in the town and will soon be grown up!

CAPTAIN. Yes, they're smart little kids; the boy has a marvellous brain – marvellous! He's going to join the General Staff. . . .

ALICE. If they will have him!

CAPTAIN. Have him? Why, he's got the makings of a War Minister!

KURT. Talking of other things – there's going to be a quarantine station here: plague, cholera and that sort of thing. The Doctor will be my superior, as you know. What sort of man is he?

CAPTAIN. Man? He isn't a man at all! He's a brainless scoundrel!

KURT (*to ALICE*). Very unpleasant for me!

ALICE. Not quite so bad as Edgar makes out: still I can't deny that he doesn't attract me. . . .

CAPTAIN. A scoundrel, that's what he is! and that's what the rest of them are too – the Customs Surveyor, the Postmaster, the telephone girl, the chemist, the pilot . . . what is it they call him . . . the Master Pilot – scoundrels, all of them; and that's why I don't associate with them!

KURT. Are you on bad terms with the whole lot of them?

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

CAPTAIN. The whole lot!

ALICE. Yes, it's quite true – one can't associate with such people!

CAPTAIN. It's just as if all the tyrants in the country had been sent to this island to be kept in custody!

ALICE (*ironically*). Precisely so!

CAPTAIN (*good-humouredly*). Hm! is that meant for me? I am no tyrant – at any rate not in my own house!

ALICE. You take care not to try *that* on!

CAPTAIN (*to KURT*). You mustn't pay any attention to her! I am a most agreeable husband, and the old girl's the best wife in the world!

ALICE. Will you have anything to drink, Kurt?

KURT. No, thank you – not now!

CAPTAIN. Have you become . . .

KURT. A little moderate – that's all!

CAPTAIN. Is that American?

KURT. Yes!

CAPTAIN. No moderation for me! I'd as soon have none at all! A man ought to be able to manage his bottle!

KURT. Coming back to our neighbours on the island here – my position will put me in touch with everybody. . . . It won't be by any means plain sailing; one gets drawn into people's intrigues, however little one wants it.

ALICE. You take up with them – you'll come back to us in the end! Your true friends are here!

KURT. Don't you find it rather dreadful – being alone in the midst of enemies?

ALICE. It isn't very pleasant!

CAPTAIN. It isn't dreadful at all! All my life I have

THE DANCE OF DEATH

had nothing but enemies, and they have helped me rather than hurt me! On my death-bed I shall be able to say, 'I owe no man anything, I have never got anything for nothing, and every scrap that I own I have had to fight for.'

ALICE. Yes, Edgar's path has not been strewn with roses. . . .

CAPTAIN. With thorns and stones, flints. . . . But a man's own strength! do you know what that is?

KURT (*simply*). Yes, I learnt to see its insufficiency ten years ago!

CAPTAIN. You must be a poor sort of creature then!

ALICE (*to the CAPTAIN*). Edgar!

CAPTAIN. Yes, he must be a poor creature if he has no strength of his own! No doubt it's true that when the machine stops working there is nothing left but a barrow-load to throw over the garden beds; but so long as the machine holds together, the thing is to kick and to fight, with hand and with foot, so long as the gear holds! That's my philosophy!

KURT (*smiling*). You do say funny things!

CAPTAIN. But you don't believe it is so?

KURT. No, I certainly don't!

CAPTAIN. No, but it is so all the same!

(During the last scene the wind has begun to blow, and now one of the doors in the background slams to.)

(Getting up.) It's beginning to blow! I could feel it coming on! *(Goes to shut the doors and taps the barometer.)*

ALICE (*to KURT*). You'll stay to supper, won't you?

KURT. Thank you!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

ALICE. It will have to be something quite simple: our housemaid has left.

KURT. Oh, it's sure to be all right!

ALICE. You are so modest in your requirements, my dear Kurt!

CAPTAIN (*at the barometer*). If you could only see how the glass is falling! I felt it in my bones!

ALICE (*aside, to KURT*). He's nervous!

CAPTAIN. We ought to have supper soon!

ALICE (*getting up*). I'm just going to see about it now! You two can sit here and have your talk; (*aside, to KURT*) but don't contradict him or he'll lose his temper. And don't ask why he never became a major! (*KURT nods assent. ALICE goes towards the door, right.*)

CAPTAIN (*sits down at the sewing-table with KURT*). See that we have something nice, old girl!

ALICE. Give me some money and you shall have it!

CAPTAIN. Always money!

(*ALICE goes out.*)

★

(*To KURT.*) Money, money, money! All day long I go about with a purse, till I fancy in the end that I *am* a purse! Do you know the feeling?

KURT. Oh, rather! the only difference being that I imagined I was a pocket-book!

CAPTAIN. Ha-ha! so you know the brand then! Those women! Ha-ha! And you yourself got hold of one of the right sort!

KURT (*patiently*). All that can be buried, now!

CAPTAIN. A regular jewel, she was! . . . Then there's

THE DANCE OF DEATH

myself. I have got at least – in spite of everything – a good woman! For she is straight, in spite of everything!

KURT (*smiling good-naturedly*). In spite of everything!

CAPTAIN. Don't laugh now!

KURT (*as before*). In spite of everything!

CAPTAIN. Yes, she's been a faithful wife . . . a splendid mother, splendid! . . . but – (*with a glance towards the door, right*) – she's got the devil of a temper. You know there have been times when I have cursed you for saddling me with her!

KURT (*good-humouredly*). But I never did that! Listen, man. . . .

CAPTAIN. Tch! you talk nonsense! You forget everything that's unpleasant to remember! Now don't mind me: I'm accustomed to commanding and storming at people, you see; but you know me, so you won't get angry.

KURT. Not a bit! But I didn't get you a wife! quite the reverse!

CAPTAIN (*not allowing his flow of language to be checked*). Don't you think life's a queer thing anyhow?

KURT. Well, I suppose it is!

CAPTAIN. And then growing old! not pleasant, but it is interesting! Well, I haven't old age to complain of, but it's just *beginning* to make itself felt! All the people one knows die off, and one feels so lonely!

KURT. Happy the man who has a wife to grow old with!

CAPTAIN. Happy? yes, there is happiness in that; for one's children leave one too! You should never have left yours!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

KURT. I didn't: they were taken from me. . . .

CAPTAIN. Now you mustn't get angry when I say . . .

KURT. But it *wasn't* so. . . .

CAPTAIN. Well, anyhow it's forgotten. But you *are* lonely!

KURT. One gets used to anything, my dear fellow!

CAPTAIN. Could one . . . could one get used to . . . to being quite alone then?

KURT. Well, look at me!

CAPTAIN. What have you been doing these fifteen years?

KURT. What a question! these fifteen years!

CAPTAIN. They say you have come into some money and are a rich man!

KURT. Rich – well hardly!

CAPTAIN. I wasn't thinking of borrowing. . . .

KURT. If you were, I should be quite ready. . . .

CAPTAIN. It's awfully good of you, but I have my own banking account. You see in this household – (*glancing towards the door, right*) – nothing must be wanting. The day I run short of money – off she goes!

KURT. Oh, surely not!

CAPTAIN. Not? But I know it! – Can you believe it? – she always watches for the times when I *am* short of money, just for the pleasure of convincing me that I don't provide for my family!

KURT. But I thought you said you had a large income.

CAPTAIN. Certainly I have a large income . . . but it's not enough.

KURT. Then it's not large, in the ordinary sense. . . .

CAPTAIN. Life is queer, and we are too! (*Clicking on the telegraph receiver.*)

THE DANCE OF DEATH

KURT. What's that?

CAPTAIN. Only the time-signal.

KURT. Haven't you got a telephone?

CAPTAIN. Yes, in the kitchen. But we use the telegraph: the telephone girls repeat everything we say.

KURT. Social life out here by the sea must be awful.

CAPTAIN. It's simply horrible! All life is horrible! And you, who believe in a sequel, do you think there will be peace afterwards?

KURT. I suppose there will be fighting and storms there too!

CAPTAIN. There too! if there is any 'there'! Rather annihilation!

KURT. Are you sure that annihilation would come without pain?

CAPTAIN. I shall die bang! and without pain!

KURT. You know that, do you?

CAPTAIN. Yes, I know that!

KURT. You don't seem to be satisfied with your life?

CAPTAIN. Satisfied? The day I die – then I shall be satisfied!

KURT (*getting up*). You don't know that! . . . But tell me: what are you two doing in this house? What is happening here? there's a smell like poisonous wall-paper – one feels sick the moment one comes in! I would rather go, if I hadn't promised Alice to stay. There's a dead body under the floor: there is hatred, – one can hardly breathe. (*The CAPTAIN falls in a heap and stares vacantly.*) What's the matter with you? Edgar! (*The CAPTAIN does not move. KURT slaps him on the shoulder.*) Edgar!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

CAPTAIN (*recovering his senses*). Did you say anything?
(*Looks round.*) I thought it was Alice! . . . Oh, it's you?
— Now . . . (*Relapses into apathy again.*)

KURT. This is terrible! (*Goes and opens door, right*). Alice!

★

ALICE (*comes out, wearing a kitchen apron*). What is it?

KURT. I don't know! look at him!

ALICE (*calmly*). He is absent-minded like that sometimes! . . . I'll play to him — then he'll wake up!

KURT. No, don't! don't . . . Let me try! . . . Can he hear? Can he see?

ALICE. Neither hear nor see just now!

KURT. And you say that so calmly! Alice, what are you two doing in this house?

ALICE. Ask him . . . there!

KURT. Him there? . . . why, it's your husband!

ALICE. To me he is a stranger — the same stranger that he was twenty-five years ago! I know nothing about this man . . . except that . . .

KURT. Stop! he may hear you!

ALICE. He can hear nothing now.

(*A bugle call is heard outside.*)

CAPTAIN (*springs to his feet and seizes his sword and cap*).
Excuse me! I must just go and inspect the sentries!
(*Goes out through the doorway in the background.*)

★

KURT. Is he ill?

ALICE. I don't know!

KURT. Is he out of his mind?

ALICE. I don't know!

THE DANCE OF DEATH

KURT. Does he drink?

ALICE. More boasting about it than actual drinking!

KURT. Sit down and talk; but calmly and truthfully!

ALICE (*sitting down*). What am I to say? — That I have lived in this tower for a lifetime, imprisoned, guarded by a man I have always hated — whom I now hate so utterly that, the day he died, I should laugh aloud!

KURT. Why did you never separate?

ALICE. You may well ask! Twice we broke off our engagement; since then there has not been a day that we didn't try to separate . . . but we are welded together and cannot get free! Once we *were* separated — in our own home — for five years! Now only death can part us. We know that, and that is why we wait for him as our deliverer!

KURT. Why are you both so lonely?

ALICE. Because he isolates me! First of all he uprooted my brothers and sisters from the house — 'uprooting' is his own word for it — then my girl friends and others. . . .

KURT. But *his* relations? You have uprooted them?

ALICE. Yes; for after robbing me of my honour and my good name, they almost robbed me of my life. — In the end I had to keep up communication with the outside world and other human beings by means of that telegraph there — you see the telephone-girls used to spy on us. I taught myself how to use it. He knows nothing about this, and you mustn't tell him, or he'll kill me.

KURT. Terrible! terrible! . . . But why does he blame *me* for your marriage? — Let me tell you how it was! . . . Edgar was my friend when we were boys.

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

He fell in love with you at first sight. Then he came to me and asked me to act as intermediary. I said at once, 'No!' Moreover, knowing your cruel and tyrannical disposition, my dear Alice, I warned him . . . and when he became importunate I sent him to get hold of your brother to plead for him.

ALICE. I believe what you say; but he has deceived himself so all these years that you'll never get the idea out of his head now!

KURT. Well, let him lay the blame on me then, if that relieves his sufferings.

ALICE. That's really too much. . . .

KURT. I am so used to . . . But what really does hurt me is the injustice of accusing me of deserting my children. . . .

ALICE. That is his nature. He says anything that suits him, and then he believes it. But he seems to be fond of you, - chiefly because you don't contradict him. . . . Now try not to be tired of us! I really think you have come at a fortunate moment for us: I regard your coming simply as a godsend! . . . Kurt! you mustn't get tired of us! We really are the most unhappy creatures in the whole world! (*Weeps.*)

KURT. One marriage I have seen at close quarters, and that was dreadful! But this is almost worse!

ALICE. Do you think so?

KURT. Yes!

ALICE. Whose fault is it?

KURT. Alice! the moment you cease asking whose fault it is, you will find relief. Try to regard it as a fact, a trial that must be borne. . . .

THE DANCE OF DEATH

ALICE. That I can't do – it's too much! (*Gets up.*)
It's past all cure!

KURT. You poor creatures! Do you know why you hate each other?

ALICE. No: ours is the most unreasoning hatred – without cause, without object, but also without end. And why do you think he is most afraid of death? Why, because he's afraid I shall marry again!

KURT. Then he loves you!

ALICE. Probably! But that doesn't stop him from hating me!

KURT (*as if to himself*). They call that love-hate, and it comes from the abyss! . . . Does he like your playing to him?

ALICE. Yes, but only hideous tunes – like that horrible 'Entry of the Boyars.' When he hears that, he becomes possessed and wants to dance.

KURT. Dances, does he?

ALICE. Yes, he's quite funny at times!

KURT. One thing more – pardon my asking! – where are the children?

ALICE. Perhaps you don't know that two of them are dead?

KURT. Have you been through that too?

ALICE. What is there that I have not been through?

KURT. But the other two?

ALICE. In the town. It was impossible they should live at home: he set them against me. . . .

KURT. And you set them against him.

ALICE. Of course. So it came to forming parties, canvassing and bribery . . . and then, so as not to ruin

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

them utterly, we parted from them! What should have been a bond of union became the cause of disunion: the blessing of a home became its curse. . . . Yes, sometimes I think we belong to an accursed race!

KURT. After the Fall – why yes, I suppose we do!

ALICE (*sharply, with a venomous look*). What fall?

KURT. Our first parents'!

ALICE. Oh, I thought you meant something else!
(*Embarrassed silence.*)

ALICE (*folding her hands*). Kurt! you are my kinsman, the friend of my childhood! I have not always treated you as I should! Now I have got my punishment, and you your revenge!

KURT. Not revenge! there is no question of that! Don't talk of it!

ALICE. Do you remember one Sunday when you were engaged? I had asked you to dinner. . . .

KURT. Hush!

ALICE. I must speak – have pity on me! . . . And when you came, you found us out and had to go home again!

KURT. You'd been asked out yourselves: is it worth talking about?

ALICE. Kurt! when I asked you to supper just now I thought we had something left in the larder! (*Hides her face in her hands.*) And there is nothing – not even a piece of bread! (*Weeps.*)

KURT. Poor, poor Alice!

ALICE. But when *he* comes in and wants something to eat, and finds there's nothing, he'll be furious! You've never seen him furious! . . . O God, what humiliation!

THE DANCE OF DEATH

KURT. Let me go out and get something.

ALICE. There's nothing to be got on the island!

KURT. Not on my account, but for his sake and yours . . . let me think of something, something. . . . We must turn the whole thing into a joke when he comes back. . . . I'll suggest that we have a drink, and meanwhile I'll think of something. . . . Get him into a good temper, play to him, – any little thing will do! Sit down at the piano and be ready!

ALICE. Look at my hands; do you call them fit to play with? I have to clean the brass and wipe glasses, light the fires and do the rooms. . . .

KURT. But you've got two servants!

ALICE. We have to say that, because he's an officer . . . but the servants are continually leaving, and sometimes we have none at all – usually in fact. How shall I get out of this – this supper? . . . oh, if only the house would catch fire!

KURT. Hush, Alice, hush!

ALICE. Or the sea rise and sweep us away!

KURT. No, no, I cannot listen to you!

ALICE. What will he say, what will he say? . . . Don't go, Kurt! don't leave me!

KURT. No, my poor friend, I *won't* go!

ALICE. Ah, but when you *have* gone. . . .

KURT. Has he ever struck you?

ALICE. Me? oh, no! He knows I would have left him if he had! one must keep some sort of pride!

(*From outside is heard: 'Halt! who goes there? – a friend!'*)

KURT. (*getting up*). Is that him?

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

ALICE (*frightened*). Yes, it's him! (*A pause.*)

KURT. What on earth shall we do?

ALICE. I don't know, I don't know!

*

CAPTAIN (*enters from the back, cheerfully*). Ah! here we are! free at last! . . . Well, has she managed to get in her complaints? Isn't hers a wretched life—what?

KURT. What's the weather like outside?

CAPTAIN. Half a gale! . . . (*facetiously, setting one of the outer doors ajar*). Sir Bluebeard and the young maiden in the tower; and outside marches the sentry with drawn sword, keeping watch over the beautiful maiden. . . . And then come the brothers, but the sentry's on guard—look! one, two, one, two! a fine sentry! look at him! Meli-tam-tam-ta, melita-lia-lay! Shall we dance the sword dance? Kurt ought to see that!

KURT. No, have the 'Entry of the Boyars' instead!

CAPTAIN. So you know that, do you? Alice in the kitchen apron, come and play! Come, I say!

(*ALICE goes reluctantly to the piano.*)

(*Pinching her arm.*) I know you've been maligning me!

ALICE. I?

(*KURT turns away. ALICE plays the Entrance March. The*

CAPTAIN goes through a kind of Hungarian dance behind the writing-table, jingling his spurs. Then he sinks down on the floor, without being noticed by KURT or ALICE, who plays the piece through to the end.)

ALICE (*without turning round*). Shall we have it over

THE DANCE OF DEATH

again? (*Silence. Turns round and sees the CAPTAIN lying senseless on the floor, hidden from the audience by the writing-table.*) Oh Heavens! (*She remains standing, with arms crossed over her breast, and gives a sigh as of thankfulness and relief.*)

KURT (*turns round and goes quickly to the CAPTAIN*). What is it? what is it?

ALICE (*in a state of great tension*). Is he dead?

KURT. I don't know! come and help me!

ALICE (*without moving*). I couldn't touch him! . . . is he dead?

KURT. No, he's alive! (*ALICE sighs. KURT stays by the CAPTAIN, who has got up and is being helped into a chair.*)

CAPTAIN. What was it? (*Silence.*) What was it?

KURT. Why, you fell down!

CAPTAIN. Did anything happen?

KURT. You fell on the floor. How do you feel now?

CAPTAIN. I? It was nothing at all! I don't know of anything! What are you both standing and gaping at?

KURT. You are ill.

CAPTAIN. Nonsense! Go on playing, Alice! . . . Ah, now it's coming back again! (*Clasps his head.*)

ALICE. Now you see! you *are* ill!

CAPTAIN. Don't shriek! it's only a giddy attack!

KURT. We must have a doctor!—I'll go and telephone! . . .

CAPTAIN. I won't have a doctor!

KURT. You must! For our own sakes we must call him in—otherwise we shall be held responsible!

CAPTAIN. I'll turn him out if he comes! I'll shoot him down! . . . Ah, there it is again! (*Clasps his head.*)

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

KURT (*goes towards the door, right*). Now I am going to telephone! (*Goes out.*)

(ALICE *takes off her apron.*)

*

CAPTAIN. Will you give me a glass of water?

ALICE. I suppose I must! (*Gives him a glass of water.*)

CAPTAIN. How amiable!

ALICE. Are you ill?

CAPTAIN. Pray forgive me for not being quite well!

ALICE. Will you look after yourself then?

CAPTAIN. You probably wouldn't care to!

ALICE. That you can be sure of!

CAPTAIN. The hour is come for which you have waited so long.

ALICE. Yes, the hour you believed would never come!

CAPTAIN. Don't be angry with me!

*

KURT (*coming in from the right*). It's too bad. . . .

ALICE. What did he say?

KURT. Rang off, without another word!

ALICE (*to the CAPTAIN*). Now we see the result of your boundless arrogance!

CAPTAIN. I think I'm getting worse! . . . try and get a doctor from the town!

ALICE (*goes to the telegraph*). I must do it by telegraph then!

CAPTAIN (*half rising, in astonishment*). Can - you - telegraph?

ALICE (*telegraphing*). I can!

CAPTAIN. Really? Go on then! . . . What a deceitful

THE DANCE OF DEATH

woman! (*To KURT.*) Come and sit by me! (*KURT does so.*) Hold my hand! I sit here and keep falling – can you imagine it? – down something: an extraordinary feeling!

KURT. Have you had this sort of attack before?

CAPTAIN. Never! . . .

KURT. While you're waiting for an answer from the town I'll go and have a talk with the doctor. Has he attended you before?

CAPTAIN. He has!

KURT. Then he knows your constitution! (*Goes to the left.*)

ALICE. The answer won't take long. It is kind of you, Kurt! but come back soon!

KURT. As soon as I can! (*Goes out.*)

★

CAPTAIN. He's a good fellow, Kurt! and how he's changed!

ALICE. Yes, and for the better! I'm sorry for him, though, being mixed up with our wretched affairs just at this time of all times!

CAPTAIN. Good luck for us, though! . . . I wonder how things really are with him! Did you notice that he wouldn't talk about his own affairs?

ALICE. I noticed it, but I don't think anyone asked him!

CAPTAIN. Think of it – his life! and ours! I wonder if all men's lives are like that!

ALICE. Very likely – though they don't talk about it as we do!

CAPTAIN. I've sometimes thought that misery attracts

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

misery, and that those who are happy shun unhappiness. That is why we never see anything but misery!

ALICE. Have you ever known any happy people?

CAPTAIN. Let me think! . . . No! . . . Yes – the Ekmarks!

ALICE. How can you say that? why, she had an operation last year. . . .

CAPTAIN. So she did! Well, then I don't know . . . yes, the von Kraffts!

ALICE. Yes, the whole family lived an idyllic life: well off, respected, nice children, suitable marriages, everything all right till they were fifty. Then that cousin of theirs went and committed a crime – prison and all that! And that was the end of their peace. The family name was dragged through the mire in all the papers. . . . The 'Krafft murder' made it impossible for that highly respected family to show their faces out of doors; the children had to be taken away from school . . . Oh, God!

CAPTAIN. I wonder what's the matter with me!

ALICE. What do you think?

CAPTAIN. Heart, or head! I feel as if my soul wanted to fly away and dissolve into a cloud of smoke.

ALICE. Are you hungry?

CAPTAIN. Yes: what about supper?

ALICE (*walks about uneasily*). I'll ask Jenny.

CAPTAIN. But she's left!

ALICE. Oh, so she has!

CAPTAIN. Ring for Kristin; I want some fresh water!

THE DANCE OF DEATH

ALICE (*rings*). Suppose . . . ! (*Rings again.*) She doesn't hear!

CAPTAIN. Go and see about it! . . . Suppose she has left too!

ALICE (*goes and opens door, left*). Good heavens! here's her box in the passage, ready packed!

CAPTAIN. Then she's gone!

ALICE. This is hell! (*Bursts into tears, falls on her knees, and lays her head on a chair, sobbing.*)

CAPTAIN. And everything at once! . . . And of course Kurt comes just in time to see what a mess we're in! If there is one humiliation left, let it come now – now!

ALICE. Do you know what I think? Kurt has gone and isn't coming back!

CAPTAIN. I can quite believe it of him!

ALICE. Yes, we are accursed! . . .

CAPTAIN. What do you mean?

ALICE. Don't you see how everybody shuns us?

CAPTAIN. What do I care? (*Clicking on the receiver.*) There's the answer! Quiet! I can hear it! . . . Nobody has time! Excuses – the rabble!

ALICE. That's what you get for despising your doctors, and not paying their bills!

CAPTAIN. That is not the fact!

ALICE. Even when you could, you wouldn't pay, because you looked down on their work, just as you looked down on mine and everybody else's! . . . They won't come! And the telephone is cut off, because you didn't think that worth anything either! Nothing is worth anything, except your rifles and guns!

CAPTAIN. Don't stand there chattering. . . .

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

ALICE. Everything comes back to us!

CAPTAIN. What a superstition! that's the sort of thing old women say!

ALICE. Well, you'll see! Do you know that we owe Kristin six months' wages?

CAPTAIN. Well, she's stolen that amount!

ALICE. Besides that, I have had to borrow from her!

CAPTAIN. I can believe that of you!

ALICE. How ungrateful you are! You know I borrowed it for the children's journey to town!

CAPTAIN. A nice way of coming back – Kurt's was! a scoundrel, like the rest of them! And a coward! Didn't daresay he'd had enough of it, – that it was more amusing at the Doctor's ball! Probably expected a rotten supper here! . . . Just like the villain!

*

KURT (*comes in quickly, left*). Well, my dear Edgar, here it is! the Doctor knows your heart inside and out. . . .

CAPTAIN. Heart?

KURT. Yes; for a long time there has been a chalky deposit in your heart. . . .

CAPTAIN. Stony heart?

KURT. And . . .

CAPTAIN. Is it dangerous?

KURT. Yes – that is to say . . .

CAPTAIN. It is dangerous!

KURT. Yes!

CAPTAIN. Fatal?

KURT. You will have to be very careful! In the first place, no cigars! (*The CAPTAIN throws away his cigar.*) Secondly, no whisky! . . . And then, to bed!

THE DANCE OF DEATH

CAPTAIN (*frightened*). No, *that* I will not do! No bed for me! That means the end! That means never getting up again! I shall sleep on the couch to-night. What else did he say?

KURT. He was very nice: would come at once if you called him.

CAPTAIN. Nice was he – the hypocrite! I won't see him! . . . Am I allowed to eat then?

CAPTAIN. Not to-night! And the next few days only milk!

CAPTAIN. Milk! I can't bear the taste of it!

KURT. Well, you'll soon learn to!

CAPTAIN. No, I'm too old to learn! (*Clasps his head.*) Ah, now it's come again! (*Remains seated, staring.*)

ALICE (*to KURT*). What did the doctor say?

KURT. Said he *may* die!

ALICE. Thank God!

KURT. Take care, Alice, take care! . . . And now go and fetch a pillow and a rug: I'm going to put him to bed here on the couch! Then I'll sit on the chair here, all night!

ALICE. And I?

KURT. You go to bed. The sight of you seems to make him worse!

ALICE. Give your orders – I'll obey! you mean well by us both! (*Goes out left.*)

KURT. By you both – mark that! I take no side in party squabbles! (*Takes the water-bottle and goes out to the right.*)

*

(*The wind is heard blowing outside. Then the background door*

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

blows open, and an OLD WOMAN of poor and unpleasant appearance peeps in.)

CAPTAIN (*wakes, sits up and looks about him*). Ah, so they have deserted me, the scoundrels! (*Catches sight of the OLD WOMAN and is frightened.*) Who is it? what do you want?

OLD WOMAN. I just wanted to shut the door, kind sir!

CAPTAIN. But why? why should you?

OLD WOMAN. Because it blew open just as I went by.

CAPTAIN. You meant to steal, did you?

OLD WOMAN. Not much here worth taking – so Kristin said!

CAPTAIN. Kristin!

OLD WOMAN. Good night, sir! Sleep well! (*Shuts the door and goes*).

*

(*ALICE comes in from the left with pillows and a rug.*)

CAPTAIN. Who was that at the door? Was there anybody?

ALICE. Yes, it was old Maja from the workhouse going by.

CAPTAIN. Are you sure?

ALICE. Are you frightened?

CAPTAIN. I, frightened? oh, dear no!

ALICE. As you don't want to go to bed you can lie down here.

CAPTAIN (*goes and lies on the couch*). I'll sleep here. (*Tries to take ALICE's hand, but she draws it away. KURT comes in with the water-bottle.*) Kurt! don't leave me!

KURT. I'm going to stay with you all night! Alice is going to bed!

THE DANCE OF DEATH

CAPTAIN. Good night then, Alice!

ALICE (*to KURT*). Good night, Kurt!

KURT. Good night!

★

KURT (*gets a chair and sits down by the CAPTAIN's couch*).
Won't you take your boots off?

CAPTAIN. No, a soldier should always be prepared!

KURT. Are you expecting a battle then?

CAPTAIN. Perhaps! (*Sits up on the couch.*) Kurt! you're the only human being I've ever laid my soul bare to! Now listen to one thing! If I should die to-night . . . take care of my children!

KURT. I will!

CAPTAIN. Thank you! I rely on you!

KURT. Can you explain why you rely on me?

CAPTAIN. We have not been friends—for friendship I don't believe in, and our families were born enemies and have always been at war. . . .

KURT. And yet you rely on me?

CAPTAIN. Yes! and I don't know why! (*Silence.*) Do you think I'm going to die?

KURT. Like everybody else! No exception will be made in your case!

CAPTAIN. Are you being sarcastic?

KURT. Yes! . . . Are you afraid of death? the wheelbarrow and the garden bed!

CAPTAIN. Suppose that were not the end!

KURT. Many think so!

CAPTAIN. And afterwards?

KURT. Nothing but surprises, I imagine!

CAPTAIN. But one knows nothing for certain.

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

KURT. No, that's just it, that's why one has to be ready for everything.

CAPTAIN. You're not so childish, I suppose, as to believe in hell?

KURT. Don't you believe in it – you who are actually in it?

CAPTAIN. That is merely a metaphor!

KURT. You have painted yours so vividly that all thought of metaphors, poetical or not, is excluded!
(*Silence.*)

CAPTAIN. If you only knew what agonies I'm suffering!

KURT. Of the body?

CAPTAIN. No, not of the body!

KURT. Then it must be of the spirit. There is no other alternative. (*A pause.*)

CAPTAIN (*sitting up on the couch*). I don't want to die!

KURT. Just now you wanted annihilation!

CAPTAIN. Yes, if it be painless.

KURT. But that, we know, it is not!

CAPTAIN. Is this annihilation then?

KURT. The beginning of it!

CAPTAIN. Good night!

KURT. Good night!

(*The same setting, but the lamp is just going out. Through the windows and the glass panes of the doors in the background a cloudy morning is visible. The sea is rough. Sentry by the battery as before. The CAPTAIN is lying on the couch asleep. KURT sits on a chair near him, looking pale and worn out from watching.*)

ALICE (*coming in from the left*). Is he asleep?

KURT. Yes, ever since what should have been sunrise.

ALICE. What sort of night did he have?

KURT. He got some sleep now and then, but he would talk so much.

ALICE. What about?

KURT. He kept on arguing about religion like a schoolboy, and at the same time claimed to have solved the riddles of the universe! Finally, towards dawn, he discovered the immortality of the soul!

ALICE. To his own glory!

KURT. Quite so! . . . He is really the most arrogant person I have ever met. 'I exist: therefore there is a God!'

ALICE. You've realized that! . . . Look at those boots! With them he would have trampled the earth flat, if he'd been allowed! With them he has trampled down other people's fields and gardens; with them he has trampled on other people's toes and on my own head! . . . Tiger, your bullet has got you now!

KURT. He might have been a comic figure, were he not so tragic! After all there are elements of greatness in all his petty meanness! Can't you find a single kind word to say for him?

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

ALICE (*sits down*). Yes, as long as he doesn't hear! One word of praise makes him mad with conceit!

KURT. He can't hear anything: he's had morphia.

ALICE. Edgar was brought up in poverty – one of many brothers and sisters. While still quite young he had to support his family by giving lessons, since his father was a scamp – or worse. No doubt it's hard on a young man to have to give up all the pleasures of youth in order to slave for a swarm of ungrateful children whom he hasn't brought into the world. I was a little girl when I saw him as a young man, going about in the winter without an overcoat, with the thermometer showing forty degrees of frost – his little sisters wore woolly coats. . . . It was fine, and I admired him, though his ugliness repelled me. He is unusually ugly, isn't he?

KURT. Yes, and his ugliness at times has something repulsive about it. I noticed it particularly when we were not on good terms; and then, when we were not together, his image grew and took on horrible shapes and sizes, so that he literally haunted me!

ALICE. Think of me then! . . . However, his earlier years as an officer were no doubt a martyrdom. But he got help now and then from rich people. He never will admit that, and he's taken whatever he's been able to get, as a tribute due to him, and without a word of thanks!

KURT. We were going to speak well of him!

ALICE. After he's dead – yes! . . . Well! . . . that's all I can remember!

KURT. Have you found him malicious?

THE DANCE OF DEATH

ALICE. Yes – and yet he can be both kind and easily moved! – As an enemy he's simply horrible!

KURT. Why did he never become a major?

ALICE. You ought to be able to guess that! They didn't want to have a man over them who'd been a tyrant when he was under them! But you must never let him see you know anything about that! He himself says that he didn't want to be major. . . . Did he mention the children at all?

KURT. Yes, he was longing for Judith!

ALICE. So I should think. And do you know what Judith is? His own image, whom he has trained to attack me! Only think – my own daughter . . . has raised her hand against me!

KURT. Oh, that is too terrible!

ALICE. Hush! he's moving! Supposing he heard us! . . . He's so cunning too!

KURT. He really is waking up!

ALICE. Doesn't he look like an ogre? I'm terrified of him! (*Silence.*)

CAPTAIN (*stirs, wakes, sits up and looks round*). It's morning! at last! . . .

KURT. How do you feel now?

CAPTAIN. Bad!

KURT. Would you like to see a doctor?

CAPTAIN. No . . . I want to see Judith! my child!

KURT. Wouldn't it be as well to set your house in order before, or – shall I say – in case anything should happen?

CAPTAIN. What do you mean? What could happen?

KURT. What may happen to us all!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

CAPTAIN. Oh, nonsense! I shan't die so easily as all that, I tell you! Don't congratulate yourself too soon, Alice!

KURT. Think of your children! make your will, so that at least your wife may keep the furniture!

CAPTAIN. Is she to get my property while I'm still alive?

KURT. No; but if anything happens she oughtn't to be turned out into the street! One who has tidied, dusted and polished these things for twenty-five years ought to have some right to keep them. May I send for the solicitor?

CAPTAIN. No!

KURT. You are a cruel man – more cruel even than I thought!

CAPTAIN (*falls back on the couch unconscious*). Here it is again!

ALICE (*going out to the right*). There's somebody in the kitchen: I must go!

KURT. Yes, go! There's not much to be done here! (*ALICE goes out.*)

*

CAPTAIN (*recovering consciousness*). Well, Kurt, how are you going to manage about your quarantine station here?

KURT. Oh, that'll be all right!

CAPTAIN. No, I'm commander on this island, so you'll have to deal with me! Don't forget that!

KURT. Have you ever seen a quarantine station?

CAPTAIN. Have I? Yes, before you were born! And I'll give you one piece of advice – don't put your disinfecting chambers too near the shore.

THE DANCE OF DEATH

KURT. My idea was to try and get as near the water . . .

CAPTAIN. That shows how much you know about your business! Why, water is the element of the bacilli – their life element!

KURT. But the salt water of the sea is needed for washing away impurities!

CAPTAIN. Idiot! . . . Well now, as soon as you are settled in, you must fetch your children to live with you.

KURT. Do you suppose they'll let themselves be fetched?

CAPTAIN. Of course, if you're anything of a man! It would make a good impression on the neighbourhood if they could see you fulfilling your duties in that point too. . . .

KURT. I have always fulfilled my duties in that point!

CAPTAIN (*raising his voice*). . . . In that point which is your weakest!

KURT. Haven't I told you . . .

CAPTAIN (*takes no notice*). . . . For one doesn't desert one's children like that. . . .

KURT. Oh, go on!

CAPTAIN. I am a relative of yours – an elder relative, and as such I think I have a right to tell you the truth, even if it is unpalatable. . . . You mustn't take it amiss. . . .

KURT. Are you hungry?

CAPTAIN. Yes, I am! . . .

KURT. Would you like something light?

CAPTAIN. No, something solid.

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

KURT. If so you're done for!

CAPTAIN. Isn't it enough for a man to be ill, without starving too?

KURT. That's what it comes to!

CAPTAIN. And no drink, and no smoke! Such a life's hardly worth living!

KURT. Death requires sacrifices—or he comes at once!

ALICE (*enters with some bouquets, telegrams and letters*). These are for you! (*Throws the flowers on the writing-table.*)

CAPTAIN (*flattered*). For me! . . . Let me see them! . . .

ALICE. Oh, they're only from the N.C.O.s, the band, and the corporals!

CAPTAIN. You are jealous!

ALICE. Oh no! If they were laurel wreaths . . . it might be another matter. But those you could never get!

CAPTAIN. Hm! . . . Here's a wire from the Colonel . . . you read it, Kurt! . . . the Colonel's a gentleman anyhow, though he is a bit of an idiot! . . . And here's another from . . . let me see! Why it's from Judith! . . . Kindly wire her to come by the next boat! . . . And here . . . yes!—one is not quite without one's friends after all! It's good of them to think of a sick man, a man of merits above his rank, without fear and without reproach!

ALICE. I don't understand! do they congratulate you on being ill?

CAPTAIN. Hyena!

ALICE (*to KURT*). Yes, we had a doctor here who was

THE DANCE OF DEATH

so detested, that when he left the island they gave a banquet – not in his honour, in honour of his departure!

CAPTAIN. Put the flowers in vases. . . . You can't call me credulous – and of course everybody is rabble – but, by Jove, this simple homage really is genuine . . . it can't be anything but genuine!

ALICE. Idiot!

KURT (*reading a telegram*). Judith says she can't come because the boat's delayed owing to the gale!

CAPTAIN. Is that all?

KURT. No-o! – there's a postscript!

CAPTAIN. Out with it!

KURT. Well, she begs Daddy not to drink so much!

CAPTAIN. Impudence! . . . That's what children are! . . . that's my one beloved daughter . . . my Judith . . . my idol!

ALICE. And image!

CAPTAIN. Such is life! and its purest joys. Good God!

ALICE. Now you're beginning to reap what you've sown! You set her against her mother, and now she turns against her father! Don't tell me there is no God!

CAPTAIN (*to KURT*). What does the Colonel say?

KURT. He gives you leave of absence – nothing more!

CAPTAIN. Leave of absence? but I never asked for any!

ALICE. No, but I did!

CAPTAIN. I don't accept it!

ALICE. Your deputy is already appointed!

CAPTAIN. That doesn't affect *me*!

ALICE. You see, Kurt! here is a man for whom laws do not exist, no constitution is valid, no human order

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

is prescribed. . . . He stands above everything and everybody: the universe is created for his own private use: the sun and moon pursue their courses to bear his praises to the stars. Such is my husband! this insignificant captain, who never could manage to be major: whose bumptiousness makes him all men's laughing-stock, while he imagines that he is feared: this wretched creature who is afraid of the dark and puts his faith in barometers:— and all this coupled with and ending in the grand climax—a barrowful of manure, — and that not of the first quality!

CAPTAIN (*fanning himself with a bouquet in a self-satisfied way, without paying any attention to ALICE*). Have you asked Kurt to breakfast?

ALICE. No!

CAPTAIN. Then see at once about two—two nice Chateaubriand steaks.

ALICE. Two?

CAPTAIN. I'm going to have one myself!

ALICE. But there are three of us here!

CAPTAIN. Oh, you're having some too? All right, get three then!

ALICE. Where am I to get them? Last night you asked Kurt to supper and there wasn't a crust of bread in the house. Kurt has had to keep watch all night on an empty stomach: he's had no coffee because there wasn't any, and because our credit is gone!

CAPTAIN. She's angry with me for not dying yesterday!

ALICE. No; for not dying twenty-five years ago: for not dying before I was born!

THE DANCE OF DEATH

CAPTAIN (to KURT). Hark to her! . . . that's the result of your match-making, my dear Kurt! Our romance wasn't made in heaven — that's a certainty!

(ALICE and KURT look at each other meaningfully. The captain gets up and goes towards the door.)

However, say what you will, I'm going on this trip (Puts on an old-fashioned busby, fastens it to his waist on his cloak.) If anyone calls for me, tell him I'm at the battery! (ALICE and KURT try to stop him. He waves them off.) Out of my way! (Goes out.)

ALICE. Yes, go! you always go, when the fight becomes too hot for you. You leave your wife to cover your retreat. You cowardly boaster, you arch-liar! Curses on you!

KURT. It's a fathomless abyss!

ALICE. Yes, and you don't know it!

KURT. Is there more than?

ALICE. But I feel ashamed . . .

KURT. Where is he off to now? He's the strength?

ALICE. You may well ask that. You go to see the N.C.O.s and then he'll eat and drink with the fellow-officers! . . . If you have been threatened with court-martial, your family has saved him! He's not afraid of his superiority! He's not a man who have put in a good record and abuses!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

KURT. I must tell you that I applied for the post here in order to find peace by the sea. . . . I knew nothing of your affairs. . . .

ALICE. Poor Kurt! . . . How will you get anything to eat?

KURT. Oh, I shall go to the Doctor's. But what about you? Do let me see after things for you.

ALICE. So long as he doesn't get to know. If he did, he would kill me!

KURT (*looking out of the window*). Look! there he is on the rampart, out in the storm!

ALICE. I'm sorry for him – that he's what he is!

KURT. I'm sorry for you both! . . . What can be done?

ALICE. I don't know! . . . A batch of bills came, too, which he didn't see! . . .

KURT. It may be an advantage sometimes *not* to see things!

ALICE (*at the window*). He has unbuttoned his cloak, for the wind to blow on his breast! So now he does want to die!

KURT. I don't think he does. Just now, when he felt his life slipping away, he grabbed hold of mine; began to busy himself with my affairs, as if he wanted to creep into me and live my life!

ALICE. That is exactly his vampire nature! . . . to seize hold of other people's fates, to suck interest out of their lives, to order and arrange for them, since his own life is absolutely without interest for him. And remember, Kurt! Never let him into your family life! never let him get to know your friends – or he'll take

THE DANCE OF DEATH

them away from you and make them his own! . . . He's a regular wizard in that way! . . . If he met your children you'd soon find them *his* most intimate friends: he would advise them and bring them up to suit his own ideas – above all, in *opposition* to your wishes!

KURT. Alice! wasn't it he who took my children away from me – when I was divorced?

ALICE. Since that's all over now – yes, it was he!

KURT. I had suspected it – but I never knew! It was he!

ALICE. When you sent my husband as peacemaker to your wife – relying on him absolutely, – he started a flirtation with her, and showed her the trick how to get hold of the children!

KURT. O God! . . . God in heaven!

ALICE. There you have another side of him! (*Silence.*)

KURT. Do you know, last night, when he thought he was going to die . . . he . . . made me promise to look after his children!

ALICE. But you don't want to take your revenge on my children?

KURT. By keeping my promise? Yes! I shall look after your children, and his!

ALICE. That is the greatest revenge you could take: there's nothing he hates so much as generosity!

KURT. So I may consider myself revenged – without taking revenge!

ALICE. I love revenge as I love justice, and I rejoice to see evil get its punishment!

KURT. You've got no further than that?

ALICE. Nor ever shall! The day I forgave or loved an enemy I should be a hypocrite!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

KURT. Alice, it may be a duty not to say everything, not to see everything! It is called forbearance, and that we all need!

ALICE. Not I! my life lies open and clear: I have always played the game.

KURT. That's saying a good deal!

ALICE. No, it's not saying enough! What I have suffered, undeservedly, for the sake of this man whom I never loved. . . .

KURT. Why did you marry him then?

ALICE. You might tell *me* that! Because he took me! seduced me! I don't know! And then I longed to climb social heights . . .

KURT. And you deserted your art!

ALICE. My despised art! — But he cheated me, you know! He held out prospects of a happy life . . . a beautiful home; and all I found was debts . . . the only gold was on his uniform, and even that wasn't gold! He cheated me!

KURT. Wait a little! When a young man falls in love he sees the future in a hopeful light . . . one must forgive him if his hopes are not always realized! I have the same deceit on my own conscience, but I don't regard myself as a cheat! . . . What are you looking at on the rampart out there?

ALICE. I'm looking to see if he hasn't fallen down.

KURT. And has he?

ALICE. No, worse luck! He cheats me all the time!

KURT. Then I'll go and see the doctor and the lawyer!

ALICE (*seats herself at the window*). Yes, go, dear Kurt!

THE DANCE OF DEATH

I'll sit here and wait. And I have learnt how to wait!

INTERVAL

(The same setting, by daylight. The sentry is marching by the battery as before. ALICE is sitting in the arm-chair, right. Her hair is grey.)

KURT *(comes in left after knocking)*. Good morning, Alice!

ALICE. Good morning, my friend! Sit down!

KURT *(sits down in arm-chair, left)*. The boat's just coming in.

ALICE. Then I know what's in store for us, if he's on it!

KURT. He is: I caught sight of the glitter of his helmet. . . . What's he been doing in the town?

ALICE. It's easy to work that out. He was in parade dress – so he must have gone to see the Colonel. He had on his best gloves – so he was paying calls.

KURT. Did you notice how quiet he was yesterday? Since he gave up drinking and became temperate he has become a different man – calm, reserved, considerate. . . .

ALICE. I know. If that man had always kept sober he would have been a terror to mankind. Perhaps it's lucky for mankind that he made himself ridiculous and harmless with his whisky!

KURT. The Spirit of the Bottle has chastised him! . . . But have you noticed how, since death set his mark on him, he has gained a dignity which ennobles him?

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

Perhaps his newly awakened idea of immortality has given him another conception of life.

ALICE. You deceive yourself! he is conjuring up evil! And don't believe what he says: he lies deliberately, and he knows the art of intrigue as no one else. . . .

KURT (*looking at ALICE*). Alice! what's this? Your hair has turned grey these last two nights!

ALICE. No, my friend: it's been like that for years. It's simply that I've stopped darkening it, since my husband is as good as dead! Twenty-five years in a prison! Did you know this place was a prison in the old days?

KURT. A prison! Yes, the walls look like that!

ALICE. And my complexion! Even the children took on the prison colour in here!

KURT. It isn't easy to imagine little children prattling within these walls!

ALICE. It wasn't often they did prattle either! The two who died perished from want of light!

KURT. What do you think's coming next?

ALICE. The decisive blow against *us*! I saw a well-known gleam in his eye when you read out Judith's telegram. It ought, of course, to have fallen on her; but she, as you know, always gets off scot-free; so his hatred struck at you!

KURT. What do you think he's aiming at in my case?

ALICE. It's not easy to say: but he possesses an incredible talent – it may be just luck – for nosing out other people's secrets. . . . And did you notice how, the whole of yesterday, he seemed to be living in your quarantine station: how he sucked an interest in life

THE DANCE OF DEATH

from your being: how he ate your children alive? . . . A man-eater, you see! I know him! His own life is going, or is gone. . . .

KURT. I've got that impression too – that he's already on the other side. His face seems to be phosphorescent, as if he were undergoing dissolution. . . . His eyes flame like will-o'-the-wisps over graves or swamps. . . . Ah, here he comes! Tell me – have you thought of the possibility that he might be jealous?

ALICE. No, he's too conceited for that! 'Show me the man I need be jealous of!' Those were his own words!

KURT. So much the better! even his faults have their advantages! . . . Anyhow, shall I get up and go to meet him?

ALICE. No, don't be too polite, or he'll think you're being treacherous! And as soon as he begins to lie, pretend to believe him! I can easily translate his lies and get at the truth, with the help of my dictionary! . . . I have a presentiment of something dreadful. . . . But, Kurt! don't lose your self-control! . . . My one advantage through our long struggle has been that I have always been temperate, and so kept my wits about me. . . . His whisky always handicapped him! . . . Now we shall see!

*

CAPTAIN (*comes in from the left, in parade dress, helmet, cloak and white gloves. Calm, dignified, but pale and hollow-eyed. Comes forward with tottering steps and sits at the right of the stage, some way from ALICE and KURT, with his helmet and cloak still on. During the following conversation he keeps his*

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

sword between his knees). Good morning! – Excuse my sitting down like this, but I'm rather tired!

ALICE and KURT. Good morning!

ALICE. How are you now?

CAPTAIN. Splendid! just a little tired! . . .

ALICE. What news from the town?

CAPTAIN. Oh, all sorts! Among other things I went to see the doctor, and he said it was nothing: that if I took care of myself, I might live another twenty years!

ALICE (*to* KURT). Now he's lying! (*To the* CAPTAIN.) That was good news, dear!

CAPTAIN. It was! (*Silence, during which the* CAPTAIN *looks at* ALICE *and* KURT, *as if he wanted them to say something.*)

ALICE (*to* KURT). Don't say a word! Let him speak first: then he'll show his hand!

CAPTAIN (*to* ALICE). Did you say anything?

ALICE. No, nothing!

CAPTAIN (*slowly*). Now, Kurt!

ALICE (*to* KURT). There! now he's coming out!

CAPTAIN. I – I was in the town, as you know. (*KURT nods assent.*) And – er – I made the acquaintance – among others – of a young cadet – (*drawlingly*) – in the artillery! (*Pause, during which* KURT *seems uneasy.*) As . . . we are short of cadets here, I arranged with the Colonel to let him come here. This ought to please you – you especially – when I tell you – that – it was – your own son!

ALICE (*to* KURT). The vampire! Now you see!

KURT. In ordinary circumstances that ought to please a father; in my case it is merely painful!

THE DANCE OF DEATH

CAPTAIN. I don't understand!

KURT. There is no need that you should: it is enough that I don't wish it!

CAPTAIN. Oh, you think so! . . . In that case let me tell you that the young man has been ordered to report here, and that from this moment he takes his orders from me!

KURT. Then I shall make him apply to be transferred to another regiment!

CAPTAIN. That you can't do, since you've no rights over your son!

KURT. Have I not?

CAPTAIN. No: the Court gave them to the mother!

KURT. Then I shall put myself in communication with the mother!

CAPTAIN. No need for that!

KURT. No need?

CAPTAIN. No: I have already done so! Ha!

(KURT rises but sinks back again.)

ALICE *(to KURT)*. Now he must die!

KURT. He is a man-eater!

*

CAPTAIN. So much for *that*! *(To ALICE and KURT, directly.)* Did you two say anything?

ALICE. No: is your hearing bad?

CAPTAIN. It is, rather! . . . But if you'll come nearer I'll tell you something between ourselves!

ALICE. There is no necessity! Besides, a witness may be advantageous for both parties!

CAPTAIN. You're right there! It's always a good thing

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

to have a witness! . . . But first of all – have you got the will ready?

ALICE (*handing him a document*). The solicitor drew it up himself!

CAPTAIN. In your favour! . . . good! (*Reads the document and then tears it carefully into strips, which he throws on the floor.*) So much for that! Ha!

ALICE (*to KURT*). Did you ever see such a man?

KURT. He isn't a man!

CAPTAIN. Now, Alice! this is what I want to say to you! . . .

ALICE (*uneasily*). Please go on!

CAPTAIN (*calmly, as before*). In consideration of your long-expressed desire to terminate the miserable life which has resulted from our unfortunate marriage, and on account of the entire lack of feeling with which you have treated your husband and children, and on account of the negligence which you have displayed in the management of our domestic economy – I have this day, while I was in town, filed an application for divorce with the Borough Court!

ALICE. Indeed? and the grounds?

CAPTAIN. Apart from the grounds already mentioned I have others which are purely personal! For instance, since it has been ascertained that I may live for another twenty years, I am thinking of changing this unfortunate union for one that suits me better – in other words, unite my destiny with that of some woman who, together with devotion to her husband, may also bring into the household youth and – may I say? – a little beauty!

THE DANCE OF DEATH

ALICE (*takes off her ring and throws it at the CAPTAIN*).
As you please!

CAPTAIN (*picks up the ring and puts it in his waistcoat-pocket*). She throws away her ring! Will the witness be so good as to note that?

ALICE (*rises, in great agitation*). So you intend to throw me out and put another woman into my house?

CAPTAIN. Tcha!

ALICE. Very well! then we'll have some plain speaking! . . . Cousin Kurt, that man has been guilty of an attempt to murder his wife!

KURT. Attempt to murder?

ALICE. Yes! he pushed me into the water!

CAPTAIN. Without witnesses!

ALICE. He lies! Judith saw it!

CAPTAIN. What difference does that make?

ALICE. She can give evidence!

CAPTAIN. No, she cannot! she says she saw nothing!

ALICE. You've taught the child to lie!

CAPTAIN. There was no need: you had already taught her!

ALICE. Did you meet Judith?

CAPTAIN. Tcha!

ALICE. O God! O God!

CAPTAIN. The fortress has surrendered! the enemy is given ten minutes for evacuation under safe-conduct! (*Places his watch on the table.*) Ten minutes; watch on the table! (*Remains standing, with his hand on his heart.*)

ALICE (*goes up to the CAPTAIN and seizes his arm*). What is it?

CAPTAIN. I don't know!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

ALICE. Do you want anything – will you have something to drink?

CAPTAIN. Whisky? No! I don't want to die! you! . . . (*Straightens himself.*) Don't touch me! . . . Ten minutes, or the garrison will be hewn down! (*Draws his sword.*) Ten minutes! (*Goes out at back.*)

★

KURT. Who is this man?

ALICE. He's a demon – not a man!

KURT. What does he want with my son?

ALICE. He wants him as a hostage, so as to have you under his thumb: he wants to isolate you from the authorities of the island. . . . Did you know that people here call this island 'Little Hell'?

KURT. No, I never heard that! . . . Alice, you are the first woman who ever aroused my pity: all others have seemed to me to deserve their fate!

ALICE. Don't desert me now! Don't go away from me – he beats me . . . he has beaten me for the last twenty-five years . . . before the children too . . . he has pushed me into the sea. . . .

KURT. After that I am against him absolutely! When I came here it was without malice – not one thought of his former slanders and attempts to humiliate me! I forgave him even when you told me he was the man who separated me from my children . . . for he was ill and dying. . . . But now that he wants to rob me of my son, he must die – he, or I!

ALICE. Good! no surrender of the fortress! Rather blow it up, and him with it, into the air, even if we have to go too! I have the powder ready!

THE DANCE OF DEATH

KURT. When I came here I bore no malice; when I felt that your hatred was infecting me I wanted to go; but now I feel irresistibly called on to hate this man – as I have hated evil itself! . . . What are we to do?

ALICE. He has taught me the tactics! Drum up his enemies and seek out allies!

KURT. To think that he should have discovered my wife! Why didn't those two meet ages ago? What a tussle there would have been – earth-quaking!

ALICE. But now those two souls have met . . . and they must be separated! I have an idea where his vulnerable point lies . . . I have long suspected it. . . .

KURT. Who is his dearest foe on the island?

ALICE. The Quartermaster!

KURT. Is he an honest fellow?

ALICE. He is; and he knows what I . . . I know it too . . . he knows what the Sergeant-major and the Captain have been up to!

KURT. Been up to? Do you mean . . . ?

ALICE. Embezzlements!

KURT. That's too appalling! No, I'd rather not be mixed up with that sort of thing!

ALICE. Ha, ha! You can't hit an enemy?

KURT. There was a time when I could: but I can't any longer!

ALICE. Why not?

KURT. Because I have discovered . . . that justice is done in any case!

ALICE. And you'll wait for that! Meanwhile you'll have lost your son! Look at my grey hair . . . yes, and feel how thick it is still! . . . He intends to marry again

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS.

. . . and then I am free – to do the same! – I am free! And in ten minutes he will be under arrest down below, down there – (*stamps on the floor*) – down there! . . . and I shall dance upon his head, I shall dance the ‘Boyars’ Entry March’ . . . (*goes through a few steps with her hands at her waist*) . . . ha, ha, ha, ha! And then I’ll play the piano for him to listen to! (*bangs the notes*). Ha! the tower is opening its gates, and the sentry with the drawn sword will be guarding – not me, but him . . . meli-tam-tam-ta, melita-lia-lay! Him, him, him shall he guard!

KURT (*who has been watching her with an intoxicated look*). Alice! are you a devil too?

ALICE (*jumps up on a chair and pulls down the laurel wreaths*). These shall go with me when the garrison marches forth! . . . triumphal laurels! and fluttering ribbons! a little dusty, but eternally green – like my own youth! I’m not old, Kurt!

KURT (*his eyes shining*). You’re a devil!

ALICE. In Little Hell! . . . Look here! I’ll make myself tidy . . . (*takes her hair down*), . . . dress in two minutes . . . go to the Quartermaster in another two . . . and then, up goes the fort sky-high!

KURT (*as before*). You are a devil!

ALICE. That’s what you always said, when we were children! Do you remember when we were children and got engaged? Ha-ha! You were shy of course. . . .

KURT (*seriously*). Alice!

ALICE. Yes, you were! and it suited you. You know there are coarse women who like shy men, and . . . they say there are shy men who like coarse women! . . . You did like me just a little then, didn’t you?

THE DANCE OF DEATH

KURT. I don't know where I am!

ALICE. With an actress whose manners are free – but, all the same, an excellent woman. Yes, yes! But now I'm free, free, free! . . . turn your back while I change my blouse! (*Unbuttons her blouse. KURT rushes up to her, seizes her in his arms, lifts her high in the air and bites her throat so that she screams. Then he hurls her on to the couch and rushes out to the left.*)

(The same setting, evening. Through the background windows the sentry by the battery is seen throughout. The laurel wreaths are hanging over the arm of a chair. The hanging lamp is lit. Soft music.)

The CAPTAIN, pale and hollow-eyed, his hair streaked with grey, in an undress uniform the worse for wear, and riding-boots, is seated at the writing-table playing patience. He is wearing his glasses. After the raising of the curtain the entracte music continues until the next character appears.

The CAPTAIN continues his game, but starts suddenly now and then, looking up and listening anxiously.

He seems unable to get the game to come out, becomes impatient and mixes up the cards. Then he goes to the window, left, opens it and throws out the pack. The window remains open, rattling on its hinges. He goes to the sideboard, becomes frightened at the noise made by the window, and turns round to see what it is. Takes out three square, dark-coloured whisky-bottles, examines them carefully, and throws them out of the window. Takes out some cigar-boxes, sniffs at one, and throws them out of the window.

After that he takes off his glasses, wipes them, and puts them on to see how they suit him. Then he throws them out of the window, stumbles along among the furniture as if he cannot see properly, and lights a six-light candelabrum on the chiffonier. Catches sight of the laurel wreaths, picks them up and goes towards the window, but turns back again. Takes the piano-cover and folds it carefully round the wreaths, taking some pins

THE DANCE OF DEATH

from the writing-table to fasten the corners, and puts them all together on a chair. Goes to the piano, bangs with his fists on the keys, locks the key-board and throws the key out of the window. Then he lights the candles on the piano. Goes to the what-not, takes his wife's portrait, looks at it and tears it to pieces, which he throws on the floor. The window rattles on its hinges and he becomes frightened again.

Then, as soon as he has become calm, he takes up the portraits of his son and daughter, kisses them hastily and thrusts them into his breast-pocket. All the rest of the portraits he sweeps down with his elbow and kicks into a heap.

Then he sits down wearily at the writing-table and puts his hand to his heart. Lights the candle on the table and sighs; stares into vacancy as if he saw unpleasant visions. . . . Gets up and goes to the chiffonier, opens the lid and takes out a packet of letters tied up with blue silk, and throws them into the stove. Closes the chiffonier. The telegraph receiver gives a single click and then stops. The CAPTAIN shrinks back in mortal terror and remains standing, with his hand on his heart, listening. Hearing nothing more from the receiver he listens in the direction of the door, left. Goes and opens it, takes one step through and comes back with a cat on his arm, stroking its back. Then he goes out to the right, and the music ceases.

*

(ALICE comes in at the back; she is dressed for walking, with darkened hair, hat and gloves. Looks round, surprised at the number of lights. KURT comes in from the left, looking nervous.)

ALICE. It looks like Christmas Eve in here!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

KURT. Well?

ALICE (*holds out her hand for him to kiss*). Say thank you! (KURT *kisses her hand reluctantly*.) Six witnesses – four of them solid as rock! The report has been made and the answer is coming here by telegram – here in the very heart of the fortress!

KURT. Oh, is it?

ALICE. Don't say 'Oh, is it?' Say 'Thank you!'

KURT. Why has he lighted so many candles?

ALICE. Because he's afraid of the dark of course! . . . Look at the telegraph-key! Doesn't it look like the handle of a coffee-mill? – I grind, and I grind, and the beans crack, as if one were pulling out teeth. . . .

KURT. What *has* he been doing here?

ALICE. It looks as if he intended to move! Down below there – that's where you'll move to!

KURT. Alice, don't talk like that! to me it is distressing. . . . He was my friend when I was young; many a time when I was in difficulties he showed me kindness. . . . I'm sorry for him!

ALICE. Then what about me, who have done no wrong and have had to sacrifice my career to this monster?

KURT. That career of yours? was it so very brilliant?

ALICE (*mad with rage*). What's that you say? Don't you know who I am, what I have been?

KURT. There, there!

ALICE. Are *you* beginning too – already?

KURT. Already?

(ALICE *flings her arms round KURT's neck and kisses him*.)

THE DANCE OF DEATH

KURT *seizes her arms and bites her in the neck so that she screams*).

ALICE. Biting me!

KURT (*beside himself*). Yes, I want to bite your throat and suck your blood like a lynx! You've roused the wild beast in me that for years I've been trying to kill by means of renunciation and self-torture. I came here thinking myself a shade better than you two, but now I am the vilest of all! Since I have come to see you in all your hideous nakedness: since passion has darkened my sense of sight – I have come to know the full power of evil; the ugly becomes beautiful: the good becomes ugly and feeble! . . . Come here, and I'll choke you . . . with a kiss! (*Embraces her.*)

ALICE (*showing her left hand*). Look at the marks of the fetters which you have broken. I was a slave and am set free!

KURT. But I'm going to bind you. . . .

ALICE. You?

KURT. I!

ALICE. For one moment I thought you were . . .

KURT. Religious?

ALICE. Yes, you held forth about the Fall. . . .

KURT. Did I?

ALICE. And I thought you had come here to preach. . . .

KURT. You thought that? . . . In an hour we shall be in the town! then you shall see what I am. . . .

ALICE. And we'll go to the theatre this evening and show ourselves! If I run away, the shame will be his: you see that, don't you?

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

KURT. I am beginning to see: imprisonment is not enough. . . .

ALICE. No, that is not enough! there must be shame too!

KURT. A curious world! You commit a shameful act, and he has to bear the shame!

ALICE. Since the world is so stupid!

KURT. It's as if these prison walls had drunk in all the evil qualities of the criminals within them: one has only to breathe here to become infected! You were thinking of the theatre and supper, I suppose! I was thinking of my son!

ALICE (*strikes him on the mouth with her glove*). You old fossil! (KURT raises his hand to box her ears. ALICE shrinks back.) *Tout beau!*

KURT. Forgive me!

ALICE. On your knees then! (KURT falls to his knees.) On your face! (KURT touches the floor with his forehead.) Kiss my foot! (KURT kisses her foot.) And never do that sort of thing again! . . . Up!

KURT (*getting up*). Where have I come to? Where am I?

ALICE. You know that!

KURT (*looking round with horror*). I almost think . . .

*

CAPTAIN (*comes in from the right, looking miserable and leaning on a stick*). Can I have a talk with you, Kurt? Alone?

ALICE. About that safe-conduct?

CAPTAIN (*seats himself at the sewing-table*). Would you be so kind as to sit with me a little, Kurt? And, Alice, will you grant us one moment's . . . peace?

ALICE. What's all this? New signals! – (To KURT.) Do

THE DANCE OF DEATH

sit down! – (KURT *sits down unwillingly*) – and hearken to the words of old age and wisdom! . . . If a telegram comes give me a call! (*Goes out to the left.*)

★

CAPTAIN (*with dignity, after a pause*). Can you understand a human destiny like mine, like ours?

KURT. No more than I can understand my own!

CAPTAIN. What then is the meaning of all this jumble?

KURT. In my better moments I have thought that the meaning was simply this: that we should be unable to discern the meaning and yet bend ourselves.

CAPTAIN. Bend! without a fixed point outside me I can never bend myself!

KURT. Quite correct: but as a mathematician you ought to be able to look for that unknown point, seeing that several known ones are given. . . .

CAPTAIN. I have looked for it and – I have not found it!

KURT. Then you must have made some mistake. Begin all over again!

CAPTAIN. Yes, I'll begin all over again! . . . Tell me! where did you learn this resignation of yours?

KURT. I have none left. Don't over-estimate me!

CAPTAIN. As you may have noticed, my interpretation of the art of living has been – elimination! that is, cancel and pass on! Early in life I made for myself a sack, into which I stuffed my humiliations; when it was full, I threw it into the sea! – I doubt if any human being has suffered so many humiliations as I. But when I cancelled them and passed on, they ceased to exist!

KURT. I've noticed how you've created in your imagination both your life and your environment!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

CAPTAIN. How else could I have borne life? how could I have held out? (*Presses his hand to his heart.*)

KURT. How are you now?

CAPTAIN. Bad! (*A pause.*) Then there comes a moment when the capacity for creating, as you call it, ceases. And then the reality stands out in all its nakedness! . . . It's terrible! (*He is speaking now in the tearful voice of an old man, his lower jaw drooping.*) Look here, my dear friend! (*Controls himself and speaks in his ordinary voice.*) Forgive me! . . . When I saw the doctor in the town just now – (*the tearful voice again*) – he said I was a broken man . . . (*in his ordinary voice*) and that I couldn't live long!

KURT. He told you *that*?

CAPTAIN (*tearful voice*). Yes, that's what he said!

KURT. The other wasn't true then?

CAPTAIN. What? Oh . . . no, that wasn't true! (*A pause.*)

KURT. And wasn't the other thing true either?

CAPTAIN. What, my dear fellow?

KURT. About my son being ordered to report here as a cadet!

CAPTAIN. I've never heard a word about that!

KURT. You know, your talent for cancelling your own misdeeds is unbounded!

CAPTAIN. My good fellow, I don't understand what you mean!

KURT. In that case you're done for!

CAPTAIN. Yes, there isn't much left!

KURT. Tell me now! perhaps you never petitioned for that divorce which would bring your wife into such disgrace?

THE DANCE OF DEATH

CAPTAIN. Divorce? No, I never heard of it!

KURT (*getting up*). Then will you admit that you've been lying?

CAPTAIN. My friend uses such strong language. We all need forbearance!

KURT. You have discovered that?

CAPTAIN (*firmly, in a clear voice*). Yes, I have discovered that! . . . So forgive me, Kurt! forgive everything!

KURT. Spoken like a man! – But I have nothing to forgive! Moreover, I am not the man you think I am – not now! Least of all, one worthy to receive your confessions!

CAPTAIN (*in a clear voice*). Life was so strange! so contrary, so malevolent, ever since my childhood . . . and mankind so malevolent that I became so too. . . . (*KURT walks about uneasily and looks at the telegraph apparatus.*) What are you looking at?

KURT. Can one shut off a thing like that?

CAPTAIN. Not very well!

KURT (*with increasing alarm*). Who is Sergeant-major Östberg?

CAPTAIN. He's an honest fellow – rather an eye to the main chance of course!

KURT. And who's the Quartermaster?

CAPTAIN. He's my enemy, I expect, but I've nothing against him.

KURT (*looking out of the window at a lantern which is moving about*). What are they doing with a lantern out by the battery?

CAPTAIN. Is there a lantern there?

KURT. Yes, and people moving about!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

CAPTAIN. Probably it's what we call a fatiguc-party!

KURT. What's that?

CAPTAIN. A few men and a corporal! Probably some poor fellow's going to be locked up!

KURT. Ah! (*A pause.*)

CAPTAIN. Now that you know Alice, what do you think of her?

KURT. I can hardly tell . . . I don't understand people at all! She's as inexplicable to me as you are, — as I am myself! You see I'm getting to the age when wisdom admits, 'I know nothing: I understand nothing!' But when I see a thing done I like to know the motive. . . . Why did you push her into the water?

CAPTAIN. I don't know! It simply occurred to me, quite naturally, while she was standing on the pier, that she ought to go in.

KURT. Have you never regretted it?

CAPTAIN. Never!

KURT. That's very strange!

CAPTAIN. It certainly is! so strange that I can't believe it was I that behaved in such a vulgar way!

KURT. Hasn't it ever occurred to you she might take her revenge?

CAPTAIN. That, I think, she has done in full; and I find it equally natural!

KURT. How did you arrive so quickly at this cynical resignation?

CAPTAIN. Since I looked death in the face, life has shown itself to me from another point of view. . . . Tell me! if you had to judge between Alice and me, which would you say was in the right?

THE DANCE OF DEATH

KURT. Neither! But both of you would have my utmost sympathy – you perhaps a little more than she!

CAPTAIN. Give me your hand, Kurt!

KURT (*gives him his hand and lays the other on the CAPTAIN'S shoulder*). Dear old fellow!

*

ALICE (*enters left, now carrying a parasol*). Dear me, how intimate! friendship for ever! . . . Hasn't the telegram come?

KURT (*coldly*). No!

ALICE. This delay makes me impatient, and when I get impatient I hurry things up! . . . Look, Kurt! now for the final bullet! now we'll bring him down! . . . First of all, I load – I know all about the rifle-manual, I do! that famous rifle-manual which never ran to 5,000 copies! . . . and then I take aim – fire! (*Taking aim with her parasol.*) And how's the new wife? the young, the fair, the unknown? You don't know! But I know how my lover is! (*Throws her arms round KURT'S neck and kisses him. He pushes her away.*) He's quite well, though still a little shy! . . . You miserable creature! I never loved you! Too conceited to be jealous, you could not see how I was fooling you just now! (*The CAPTAIN draws his sword and rushes at her to strike her, but hits only the furniture.*) Help, help! (*KURT does not stir.*)

CAPTAIN (*falls, with the sword in his hand*). Judith, avenge me!

ALICE. Hurrah! he's dead! (*KURT retires towards door at back.*)

CAPTAIN (*rising*). Not yet! (*Sheathes his sword: goes and sits in arm-chair by the sewing-table.*) Judith! Judith!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

ALICE (*going towards KURT*). I'm coming now ~ with you!

KURT (*thrusting her from him so that she falls on her knees*). Go back to the abyss, from whence you came! ~ Good-bye for ever! (*Goes towards door*.)

CAPTAIN. Don't leave me, Kurt: she'll kill me!

ALICE. Kurt! don't desert me! don't desert us!

KURT. Good-bye! (*Goes*.)

★

ALICE (*changing her attitude*). What a wretch! There's a friend for you!

CAPTAIN (*gently*). Forgive me, Alice! and come here! come quickly!

ALICE (*turning towards him*). That's the most miserable wretch and hypocrite I've ever met! ~ You *are* a man, anyhow!

CAPTAIN. Alice, listen! I *can't* live much longer!

ALICE. Oh!

CAPTAIN. The doctor told me!

ALICE. Then all the rest was untrue?

CAPTAIN. Yes!

ALICE (*beside herself*). Oh, what have I done? . . .

CAPTAIN. There's a remedy for everything!

ALICE. Ah, but this is past all cure!

CAPTAIN. Nothing is past all cure, if only one cancels it, and passes on!

ALICE. But the telegram! the telegram!

CAPTAIN. What telegram?

ALICE (*on her knees beside the CAPTAIN*). Are we outcasts? Must it be? I have sprung a mine under myself ~ under both of us! Why did you have to tell lies? And

THE DANCE OF DEATH

why need that man come and tempt me? . . . We are lost! All might have been cured, all forgiven, through your high-mindedness!

CAPTAIN. What is there that cannot be forgiven? what have I not forgiven you?

ALICE. You are right . . . but there can be no remedy!

CAPTAIN. I know your talent for inventing evil, but I cannot guess. . . .

ALICE. Oh, if I could only find a way out! If only I could! then I should take care of you . . . I should love you, Edgar!

CAPTAIN. Listen to that! Where am I?

ALICE. Do you think no one can help us? . . . no — no mortal could do that!

CAPTAIN. Who could then?

ALICE (*looking straight into his eyes*). I don't know! . . . Oh, and what is to become of the children, with a dishonoured name . . . ?

CAPTAIN. Have you dishonoured that name?

ALICE. Not I! not I! . . . And they'll have to leave school! And when they go out into the world they'll be lonely, as we are lonely, and evil as we are! Then you didn't meet Judith either — I gather now?

CAPTAIN. No! but cancel that! (*Clicking in telegraph apparatus. ALICE starts up.*)

ALICE (*screams out*). Now, at last, ruin is upon us! (*To the CAPTAIN.*) Don't listen to it!

CAPTAIN (*calmly*). I won't listen, dear child: calm yourself!

ALICE (*standing by the instrument on tiptoe to see out of the window*). Don't listen! don't listen!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

CAPTAIN (*stopping up his ears*). I'm stopping my ears, Lisa, my child!

ALICE (*on her knees with outstretched hands*). God help us! — the fatigue-party is coming! (*Weeping bitterly.*) God in heaven! (*She seems to move her lips as if in silent prayer. The instrument goes on clicking for a while, and a long strip of paper comes out. Then silence again.*)

ALICE (*gets up, tears off the paper strip and reads it to herself. Then she raises her eyes to heaven, goes up to the CAPTAIN and kisses his forehead*). It's over! it was nothing! (*Sits down in the other chair, takes out her handkerchief and bursts into tears.*)

CAPTAIN. What are these secrets of yours?

ALICE. Don't ask me! it's all over now!

CAPTAIN. As you like, child!

ALICE. You wouldn't have said that three days ago! what has done it?

CAPTAIN. Well, dear, when I fell down that first time I passed over for a while to the other side of the grave. I have forgotten what I saw there, but the impression remains!

ALICE. What was it?

CAPTAIN. The hope — of something better!

ALICE. Something better?

CAPTAIN. Yes! That this could be the true life I have never really believed . . . this life is death — or worse!

ALICE. And we . . .

CAPTAIN. Were probably set here to torment each other . . . so it seems!

ALICE. Have we tormented each other enough?

CAPTAIN. Yes, so I believe! And played sad havoc!

THE DANCE OF DEATH

(Looks round.) . . . Shall we put our house in order?
And clean up everything?

ALICE (*getting up*). Yes, if it's possible.

CAPTAIN (*looking about the room*). It can't be done in
a day – it certainly can't!

ALICE. In two then! – many days!

CAPTAIN. Let's hope so! . . . (*A pause.*) So you
didn't manage to get free this time! But then you didn't
get me locked up either! (*ALICE looks astonished.*) Yes,
I knew you wanted to have me in prison, but I cancel
that! . . . I don't suppose that's the worst thing you've
done. . . . (*ALICE is speechless.*) Moreover, I was not
guilty of that embezzlement!

ALICE. And now the idea is that I should be your
nurse?

CAPTAIN. If you will!

ALICE. What else is there for me to do?

CAPTAIN. I don't know!

ALICE (*sits down, listless and despairing*). These must be
the eternal torments! Is there no end to them?

CAPTAIN. Yes, if we wait patiently! Perhaps when
death comes, life begins.

ALICE. If only it were so! (*A pause.*)

CAPTAIN. You think Kurt was a hypocrite?

ALICE. Certainly I do!

CAPTAIN. I don't! But all who come near us become
evil, and go their ways. . . . Kurt was weak, and evil
is strong! (*A pause.*) How commonplace life is now!
Once we fought – now we merely shake our fists! – I'm
almost sure that, three months from now, we shall be
having our silver wedding . . . with Kurt for our best

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

man . . . and the Doctor and Gerda among the guests . . . the Quartermaster to propose the toast, and the Sergeant-major to lead the cheering! The Colonel will invite himself, if I know him! - Yes, you may laugh! But do you remember Adolph's silver wedding - that fellow in the Rifle? When the bride had to wear the ring on her right hand because the bridegroom, in a tender moment, had chopped off her left ring-finger with a billhook. (*Alice holds her herkerchief to her mouth to stop herself from laughing.*) Are you crying? No, I do believe you're laughing! - Yes, child! We weep in part and we laugh in part! Which is the more fitting - well, don't ask me! . . . I saw the other day in the papers about a man who had been divorced seven times - consequently married seven times - who finally ran off in his ninety-ninth year and re-married his first wife! That's what love is! . . . Whether life is serious or only a jest I cannot say! It may be that it is most painful when it is a jest, and that when serious it is really most pleasurable and peaceful. . . . But the moment one learns at last to be serious, some one comes and turns it into a jest! Kurt, for example! . . . Shall we have our silver wedding? (*ALICE is silent.*) Do say yes - they'll laugh at us, but what does that matter? We'll laugh too, or keep serious - just as it suits us!

ALICE. So be it, then!

CAPTAIN (*seriously*). Silver wedding be it then! (*Gets up*). Cancel, and pass on! - well then, let's pass on!

CURTAIN

PART II

SCENE: *An oval-shaped drawing-room in white and gold. The wall at the back is broken by some French windows standing open. Through these is seen the garden terrace outside, with stone balustrade and light-blue faience pots containing petunias and scarlet pelargoniums. This terrace is a public promenade. In the background is seen the shore battery with an artilleryman on sentry duty. In the distance the open sea.*

The drawing-room contains on the left a gilded sofa, table and chairs: on the right a grand piano, a writing-table and a fireplace.

In the foreground an American easy chair.

By the writing-table is a copper standard lamp with a table attached to it. On the walls are several old oil-paintings.

ALLAN *is sitting at the writing-table doing sums. JUDITH comes in through the French window. She is in summer dress, short skirt, hair in plaits. She holds her hat in one hand and a tennis-racket in the other. She stops in the doorway. ALLAN rises, serious and respectful.*

JUDITH (*seriously, but in a friendly tone*). Why don't you come and play tennis?

ALLAN (*shyly, struggling with his emotion*). I'm so busy. . . .

JUDITH. Didn't you see I put my bike pointing towards the oak, and not the other way?

ALLAN. Yes, I saw!

JUDITH. Well, and what does that mean?

ALLAN. It means . . . that you want me to come and play tennis . . . but my work . . . I've got some

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

problems to do . . . and your father's a very strict teacher. . . .

JUDITH. Do you like him?

ALLAN. Yes, I do! He takes such an interest in all his pupils. . . .

JUDITH. He takes an interest in everybody and everything. — Are you coming?

ALLAN. You know well enough I'd like to: but I oughtn't to!

JUDITH. I'll get leave from Daddy!

ALLAN. No, don't do that! It'll only lead to a lot of talk!

JUDITH. Don't you think I can *manage* him? He wants what I want!

ALLAN. I suppose that's because you're so hard! — That's why!

JUDITH. You ought to be hard too!

ALLAN. I don't belong to the wolf family!

JUDITH. Then you must be a sheep!

ALLAN. I'd rather be that!

JUDITH. Tell me why you won't come and play?

ALLAN. You know why.

JUDITH. Tell me all the same! . . . The Lieutenant . . .

ALLAN. Yes, you don't care one pin about me, but you can't enjoy yourself with the Lieutenant unless I'm there too, so that you can see me being tortured!

JUDITH. Am I so cruel? I never knew that!

ALLAN. Well, you know now!

JUDITH. I must reform then. I don't want to be cruel; I don't want *you* to think I'm bad.

ALLAN. You only say that to be able to tyrannize over me! I'm already your slave, but you aren't con-

THE DANCE OF DEATH

tent with that. The slave must be tortured and thrown to wild beasts! . . . You've got that other fellow in your clutches already, so what do you want me for? You go your way and I'll go mine!

JUDITH. Are you ordering me to go? (ALLAN *does not answer.*) Very well, I'll go then! — Being cousins we shall have to meet occasionally, but I shan't trouble you! (ALLAN *sits at the table and goes on with his sums.* JUDITH, *instead of going, comes forward and gradually approaches the table where ALLAN is sitting.*) Don't be afraid — I'm just going . . . I only wanted to see what sort of place the quarantine officer's got. (*Looks round.*) White and gold! — Bechstein grand! — hoo! — We're still in the fort-tower since Dad got pensioned, the same old tower Mummy's been in twenty-five years. . . . And we're only there on sufferance! You are rich, you . . .

ALLAN (*calmly*). We aren't rich!

JUDITH. So you say, but you're always so nicely dressed. For that matter, whatever you wear always seems to suit you! . . . Do you hear what I say? (*Comes nearer.*)

ALLAN (*submissively*). Yes, I hear.

JUDITH. How can you hear when you sit there doing sums or whatever it is?

ALLAN. I don't hear with my eyes!

JUDITH. Your eyes! . . . By the way, have you ever looked at them in a glass?

ALLAN. Oh, get away!

JUDITH. You despise me, do you?

ALLAN. My dear girl, I'm not thinking about you at all!

JUDITH (*coming nearer*). Archimedes, sitting at his

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

sums, when the soldier comes and cuts him down!
(*Mixes up his papers with her racket.*)

ALLAN. Leave my papers alone!

JUDITH. That's what Archimedes said too! . . . I suppose you've got some curious idea in your head: you think I can't live without you!

ALLAN. Why can't you leave me in peace?

JUDITH. Be polite and I'll help you with your exam. . . .

ALLAN. You?

JUDITH. Yes; I know the examiners. . . .

ALLAN (*severely*). What do you mean?

JUDITH. Don't you know one ought to get the examiners on one's side?

ALLAN. Do you mean your father and the Lieutenant?

JUDITH. And the Colonel!

ALLAN. You mean that under your protection I shouldn't have to work?

JUDITH. You're a bad translator . . .

ALLAN. Of a bad original. . . .

JUDITH. You ought to be ashamed of yourself!

ALLAN. So I am, and of you too! I'm ashamed of having listened to you! . . . Why don't you go?

JUDITH. Because I know how much you value my company. — Yes, you always manage to pass under my window! you've always got something to do in the town that makes you take the same boat as I do! you can't go for a sail without having me to look after the foresail for you!

ALLAN (*shyly*). Young girls shouldn't say that sort of thing!

JUDITH. Do you mean to say I'm a child?

THE DANCE OF DEATH

ALLAN. Sometimes you're a good child, and sometimes a bad woman! You seem to have picked *me* out to be your sheep.

JUDITH. You are a sheep: that's why I'm going to protect you!

ALLAN (*getting up*). The wolf makes a jolly poor shepherd! . . . You want to eat me . . . that's the idea, I suppose! You want to pawn your pretty eyes so as to get hold of my head.

JUDITH. Oh, have you been looking at my eyes? I shouldn't have thought you had the pluck!

(ALLAN *gathers up his papers and starts to go out to the right.* JUDITH *places herself before the door.*)

ALLAN. Get out of my way, or . . .

JUDITH. Or what?

ALLAN. If only you were a boy! Bah! but you're a girl!

JUDITH. Yes?

ALLAN. If you'd had one spark of pride you'd have gone; I as good as turned you out!

JUDITH. I'll pay you back for that!

ALLAN. I'm sure you will!

JUDITH (*furious, going out at the back*). I'll - pay - you - back - for that! (*Goes out.*)

*

KURT (*coming in from the left*). Where are you off to, Allan?

ALLAN. Oh, is that you?

KURT. Who was it went off in such a hurry - making the bushes shake like that?

ALLAN. Judith.

KURT. A trifle hot-headed, but a nice girl!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

ALLAN. Any girl who is ill-natured and coarse is always said to be a nice girl!

KURT. You shouldn't be so hard on people, Allan! . . . Aren't you satisfied with your new relations?

ALLAN. I like Uncle Edgar. . . .

KURT. Yes, he has many good points. . . . And then your other teachers? The Lieutenant for example?

ALLAN. He's so variable! sometimes I fancy he's got some grudge against me.

KURT. Oh, no! . . . You're always having 'fancies' about people. Don't brood, but do the correct thing; mind your own business, and let other people mind theirs!

ALLAN. So I do; but they won't leave me in peace! They drag one in . . . just like the cuttle-fish down by the jetty . . . they don't bite, but they stir up an eddy that sucks. . . .

KURT (*in a friendly tone*). You seem to be inclined to melancholy! Don't you get on all right here with me? Is there anything you miss?

ALLAN. I've never had such a good time, but . . . there's something here that chokes me!

KURT. Here by the sea? Don't you like the sea?

ALLAN. Yes, the open sea! But on the shore there's goose-grass, cuttle-fish, jelly-fish, and sea-nettles or whatever they're called!

KURT. You shouldn't stay indoors so much! go out and play tennis!

ALLAN. That doesn't amuse me!

KURT. I see: you're angry with Judith!

ALLAN. Judith?

THE DANCE OF DEATH

KURT. You're so particular about your fellow-creatures! One shouldn't be that; it leads to loneliness.

ALLAN. I'm not particular, but . . . I feel as if I were at the bottom of a wood-pile . . . and had to wait my turn to get into the fire . . . it weighs me down so – all that's above me. . . .

KURT. Wait till your turn comes! the pile keeps on getting smaller. . . .

ALLAN. Yes, but so slowly, oh, so slowly! . . . And meanwhile I lie there and grow mouldy!

KURT. It is not pleasant to be young! And yet people envy you!

ALLAN. Do they? Would you change with me?

KURT. No, thank you!

ALLAN. Do you know what's the worst of all? It's to sit still and keep quiet while one's elders are talking nonsense . . . I'm certain I know more about a thing than they do . . . and yet I have to keep silence! Oh, of course I don't count you as one of the old ones!

KURT. Why not?

ALLAN. Perhaps because we've only just got to know each other . . .

KURT. And because . . . you then formed another opinion of me!

ALLAN. Yes!

KURT. I imagine that, during the years we were separated, you didn't always feel very friendly towards me?

ALLAN. No!

KURT. Did you ever see my photograph?

ALLAN. Only one – and that was very unflattering!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

KURT. And old-looking?

ALLAN. Yes!

KURT. Ten years ago my hair turned grey in a single night . . . it has since got right again of itself. . . . Let's talk about something else! . . . Ah, here comes your Aunt! my cousin! How do you like her?

ALLAN. I'd rather not say!

KURT. Then I won't ask!

*

ALICE (*comes in, dressed in a very light summer walking dress with parasol*). Good morning, Kurt! (*Gives him a look signifying that ALLAN is to go.*)

KURT (*to ALLAN*). You'd better go, Allan! (*ALLAN goes out to the right. ALICE sits on the sofa left, KURT on a chair near her.*)

*

ALICE (*confused*). He's coming in a minute, so you needn't feel embarrassed!

KURT. Why should I?

ALICE. With your strict ideas . . .

KURT. As regards myself, yes!

ALICE. Quite so! . . . I forgot myself once when I saw in you the liberator, but you kept your presence of mind . . . and so we have a right to forget . . . what has never been!

KURT. Forget it then!

ALICE. Still . . . I don't think *he* has forgotten. . . .

KURT. You mean that night when he fell down from a heart attack . . . and you began to exult too soon, thinking he was dead?

ALICE. Yes! . . . Since then he has recovered; but

THE DANCE OF DEATH

when he stopped drinking he learnt how to keep silent, and now he's terrible. He's up to something that I can't understand. . . .

KURT. Alice, your husband is a harmless fool. He shows me nothing but kindness . . .

ALICE. Beware of his kindnesses! I know them!

KURT. Oh, I say . . .

ALICE. So he's hoodwinked you too! . . . Can't you see the danger? Don't you notice the traps?

KURT. No!

ALICE. Then your doom is sealed!

KURT. Oh, heavens!

ALICE. Fancy my sitting here watching ruin creeping towards you like a cat. . . . I point to it, but you can't see it!

KURT. Allan, with his unspoilt vision, can't see it either. As a matter of fact he sees only Judith. That, I think, ought to be a certain guarantee of friendly relations.

ALICE. Do you know Judith?

KURT. A coquettish little thing, with pigtails down her back, and skirts a bit too short. . . .

ALICE. Exactly! But I saw her in a long skirt the other day . . . looking quite the young lady . . . not so very young either when she had her hair up!

KURT. She's a bit precocious, I admit!

ALICE. And she's playing with Allan!

KURT. That's all right, so long as it is play.

ALICE. Oh, it *is*, is it? . . . And now, in a minute or two, Edgar will be here. He'll sit in your arm-chair - he loves it so passionately he could steal it.

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

KURT. He can have it!

ALICE. Let him sit over there, and we'll stay here. And when he talks – he's always very chatty in the morning – when he talks about trivial matters, I'll translate them for you! . . .

KURT. Oh, you're too clever, far too clever, my dear Alice! What could I have to fear, so long as I look after my quarantine properly and behave myself in other respects?

ALICE. You believe in justice and honour and all that sort of thing.

KURT. Yes; and experience has taught me that belief. Once I believed the opposite . . . it cost me dear!

ALICE. Now he's coming! . . .

KURT. I've never seen you frightened before!

ALICE. My courage was merely ignorance of the danger!

KURT. The danger? . . . You'll begin to frighten me soon!

ALICE. Oh, if only I could! . . . There!

*

(CAPTAIN comes in at the back, in civilian dress, black frock-coat, military cap, and silver-handled stick. He greets them with a nod, and goes and sits in the arm-chair.)

ALICE (to KURT). Let him speak first!

CAPTAIN. This is a splendid chair you've got here, my dear Kurt! Simply splendid!

KURT. You may have it with pleasure, if you'll accept it!

CAPTAIN. I didn't mean . . .

KURT. No, but *I* do! Surely you've given *me* enough things

CAPTAIN (*volubly*). Oh, nonsense! . . . And sitting

THE DANCE OF DEATH

here I get a view of the whole island, all the public walks, all the people on their verandas, all the ships upon the sea, going out and coming in. . . . You really have hit on the very best bit of the island – which certainly is *not* an Island of the Blest. What do you say, Alice? . . . Yes, they call it 'Little Hell,' and here Kurt has built himself a Paradise: no Eve, of course: for when she came, Paradise was at an end! By the way, do you know this place was once a royal hunting lodge?

KURT. So I've heard!

CAPTAIN. You live royally, you do! But, if I may say so, you have to thank me for that!

ALICE (*to KURT*). There now! he wants to steal you!

KURT. I have a good many things to thank you for!

CAPTAIN. Oh, nonsense! – By the way, did you get those cases of wine?

KURT. Yes!

CAPTAIN. And you're satisfied?

KURT. Perfectly! you can tell your dealer so, with my compliments!

CAPTAIN. His things are always first-rate . . .

ALICE (*to KURT*). At second-rate prices; and you have to pay the difference. . . .

CAPTAIN. What did you say, Alice?

ALICE. I? Nothing!

CAPTAIN. Yes: when this quarantine station was established, I intended to apply for the post myself . . . and with that object I made a study of quarantine systems.

ALICE (*to KURT*). That's a lie!

CAPTAIN (*bragging*). The antiquated ideas held by the Board on disinfection methods were not shared by me!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

I was on the side of the Neptunists – so called because they lay stress on the use of water . . .

KURT. Excuse me! I certainly remember it was I who preached water, and you fire, on that occasion.

CAPTAIN. I? What nonsense!

ALICE (*aloud*). Yes, I remember that too!

CAPTAIN. Do you?

KURT. I remember it all the more . . .

CAPTAIN (*cutting him short*). Well, it may be so, but it makes no difference! (*Raising his voice.*) However . . . we have now reached a point where a new state of affairs . . . (*to KURT, who tries to interrupt*) be quiet, please! . . . has come to pass . . . and the quarantine system is on the point of taking a giant's stride forward.

KURT. By the way, do you know who writes those silly articles in the paper?

CAPTAIN (*getting red*). No, I don't; but why do you call them silly?

ALICE (*to KURT*). Look out! He wrote them himself!

KURT (*to ALICE*). He did? . . . (*To the CAPTAIN.*) Not very intelligent then?

CAPTAIN. You're hardly the one to judge of that!

ALICE. Are you going to quarrel?

KURT. Oh no!

CAPTAIN. It's difficult to keep peace on the island, but we ought to set a good example. . . .

KURT. Yes; and can you explain this to me? When I came here I made friends at once with all the officials; with the lawyer especially I became on intimate terms – as intimate as one can be at our time of life. Well, after a time – it was just after you got well again – they

THE DANCE OF DEATH

all begin, one man after another, to show me the cold shoulder, and yesterday the lawyer cut me on the public promenade. I can't tell you how hurt I felt! (*The CAPTAIN remains silent.*) Have you noticed any ill-feeling towards yourself?

CAPTAIN. No; quite the contrary!

ALICE (*to KURT*). Don't you see he's stolen your friends?

KURT (*to the CAPTAIN*). I wondered whether it could have anything to do with that new issue which I refused to subscribe to!

CAPTAIN. Oh, no! But can you tell me why you wouldn't subscribe?

KURT. Because I'd already put my little savings into your soda factory! Also because a new issue shows there's something wrong with the original shares.

CAPTAIN (*preoccupied*). That's a splendid lamp you've got! Where on earth did you get it?

KURT. In the town of course.

ALICE (*to KURT*). You keep an eye on your lamp!

KURT (*to the CAPTAIN*). You mustn't think I'm ungrateful or distrustful, Edgar.

CAPTAIN. No, but it doesn't show much confidence, your wanting to back out of a thing which you helped to start.

KURT. My dear fellow, ordinary prudence tells a man to save himself and what is his before it's too late!

CAPTAIN. Save? Is there any danger afoot? Is anyone thinking of robbing you?

KURT. Why put it so crudely?

CAPTAIN. Weren't you pleased when I helped you to invest your money at six per cent.?

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

KURT. Yes, I was even grateful!

CAPTAIN. You're not grateful – it's not your nature: but that's not your fault!

ALICE (*to KURT*). Just listen to him!

KURT. No doubt my nature is full of imperfections, and my struggle against them has not been very successful: still I do recognize obligations. . . .

CAPTAIN. Show it then! (*Stretches out his hand to pick up a newspaper.*) Ah, what have we here? . . . an announcement! (*Reads.*) Death of the Sanitary Commissioner!

ALICE (*to KURT*). He's speculating in the corpse already!

CAPTAIN (*as if to himself*). This will involve certain . . . changes . . .

KURT. In what respect?

CAPTAIN (*getting up*). That remains to be seen!

ALICE (*to the CAPTAIN*). Where are you going?

CAPTAIN. I think I must go into the town! . . . (*Catches sight of an envelope on the writing-table, picks it up abstractedly as it were, reads the address, and puts it back.*) Forgive my absent-mindedness!

KURT. No harm done!

CAPTAIN. There's Allan's geometry-set! Where is the boy?

KURT. Out, playing with the girls.

CAPTAIN. That great boy? I don't like it! And Judith oughtn't to be running about like that. . . . You'd better keep an eye on your young gentleman, and I'll look after my young lady! (*Passes the piano and strikes a few notes.*) Splendid tone – this instrument! A Steinbech, isn't it?

KURT. A Bechstein!

THE DANCE OF DEATH

CAPTAIN. Yes, you're well off, you are! You ought to thank me for bringing you here!

ALICE (*to KURT*). That's a lie! he tried to keep you away!

CAPTAIN. Well, good-bye for the present! I'm taking the next boat! (*Goes out, examining the pictures on the walls.*)

★

ALICE. Well?

KURT. Well?

ALICE. At present I don't understand his plans. But – tell me one thing! That envelope he looked at – who was the letter from?

KURT. I'm ashamed to say – it was my one secret!

ALICE. And *that* he scented out! He's a wizard, you see, as I told you before! . . . Is there anything printed on the envelope?

KURT. Yes, the words 'Electors' Association.'

ALICE. Then he's guessed your secret. You want to get into Parliament, I gather! And now you'll have the pleasure of seeing *him* there instead!

KURT. Has he ever thought of it?

ALICE. No, but he's thinking of it now! I read that in his face while he was looking at the envelope.

KURT. Is that why he's going into the town?

ALICE. No: he decided on that when he saw the obituary notice!

KURT. What does he expect to gain by the Commissioner's death?

ALICE. You may well ask! . . . Perhaps the man was an enemy who stood in the way of his schemes!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

KURT. If he is as terrible as you say, there may be some reason to fear him!

ALICE. Didn't you see how he wanted to steal you away, to tie your hands by alleging obligations which don't exist? For instance, he never got you the post: on the contrary, he tried to keep you out of it! He's a man-stealer, an insect, a wood-worm, burrowing inside you, till one day you'll be as hollow as a rotten pine-tree. . . . He hates you, though he's bound to you by the memories of youthful friendship. . . .

KURT. How ingenious you become when you hate!

ALICE. And stupid, when one loves! blind and stupid!

KURT. No, no! don't say that!

ALICE. Do you know what's meant by a vampire? . . . Why, it's a dead man's soul, seeking a body to live in as a parasite. Edgar is dead, ever since he fell down that time! He has no interests of his own, no personality, no initiative. But if he can only manage to get hold of some human being, he twines himself round him, throws out his suckers, and begins to grow and blossom. Now he's clinging on to you!

KURT. If he gets too near, I'll shake him off!

ALICE. Try shaking off a burr - then you'll see! . . . Now, do you know why he doesn't want Judith and Allan to play together?

KURT. I suppose he's anxious about their feelings!

ALICE. Not in the least! . . . He wants to marry Judith to . . . the Colonel!

KURT (*shocked*). That old widower?

ALICE. Yes!

KURT. Horrible! . . . And Judith?

THE DANCE OF DEATH

ALICE. If she could get the General, who is eighty, she'd take him, so as to snub the Colonel, who is sixty. Snubbing, you see – that's her object in life! To trample and to snub – there you have the watchword of *that* family!

KURT. Judith like that? That fair, proud and glorious young damsel!

ALICE. Oh, we know all about that! . . . May I sit here and write a letter?

KURT (*tidying the writing-table*). Please do!

ALICE (*takes off her gloves and sits at the writing-table*). Now I'll try my hand at the art of war! I failed once, when I meant to slay my dragon! But now I've learnt something of the business!

KURT. Are you aware that one's supposed to load before firing?

ALICE. Yes, and with ball-cartridges too!

(KURT *withdraws to the right*, ALICE *ponders and writes*.)

*

(ALLAN *rushes in without seeing ALICE, and throws himself face downwards on the sofa, sobbing into a lace handkerchief*.)

ALICE (*watches him for a moment, then gets up and goes towards the sofa. Speaks gently*). Allan! (ALLAN *sits up, embarrassed, and hides the handkerchief behind his back*.) (ALICE *in a gentle, womanly manner, and with real emotion*.) You mustn't be afraid of me, Allan! I'm not likely to hurt you. . . . What is the matter? – Are you ill?

ALLAN. Yes!

ALICE. In what way?

ALLAN. I don't know!

ALICE. Have you got a headache.

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

ALLAN. No-o!

ALICE. In your chest? frightful pain?

ALLAN. Yes! Ye-es!

ALICE. Pain—pain as if your heart were melting away! Something that drags, and drags . . .

ALLAN. How do you know?

ALICE. And then you want to die—you wish you were dead, and everything is so hard. And you think only of one thing, always the same . . . one person, always the same . . . but if two are thinking of the same person, then grief weighs heavily—on one of them. . . . (ALLAN *forgets himself and fingers the handkerchief.*) That is the illness no one can cure . . . you can't eat, you don't want to drink, only to weep, and such bitter tears . . . and you like to be in the woods, so that nobody can see you, for that is the kind of grief people laugh at . . . cruel people! Ugh! . . . What do you want of her? Nothing! You don't want to kiss her lips, for you think you'd die if you did. You feel as if death were approaching when your thoughts fly to her! And it is death, dear, the death which gives life. But that you won't understand just yet!

A scent of violets! it must be hers! (*Goes up to ALLAN and takes the handkerchief gently away.*) Yes, it's she, she everywhere, she only! Oh, oh, oh! (ALLAN *sees no help for it, and hides his face on her breast.*) Poor boy! poor boy! Oh, how it hurts, how it hurts! (*Dries his tears with the handkerchief.*) There, there, there! Cry! that's right—cry it out! That eases the heart! . . . But now, Allan, get up and be a man—otherwise she won't look at you, she, the cruel one, who is *not* cruel!

THE DANCE OF DEATH

Has she been tormenting you? . . . with the Lieutenant? Look here, my child! you must make friends with the Lieutenant, so that you two can have talks about her! That usually gives a little relief too!

ALLAN. I don't want to look at the Lieutenant!

ALICE. Look here, little boy! It won't be long before the Lieutenant looks you up so as to have a talk about her! you see . . . (ALLAN *looks up, with a ray of hope.*) Well? Shall I be nice and tell you? (ALLAN *bows his head.*) He's just as unhappy as you are!

ALLAN (*joyfully*). No?

ALICE. Oh but he is! And he wants somebody to open his heart to when Judith hurts him. You seem to be happy already!

ALLAN. Doesn't she want the Lieutenant?

ALICE. Nor you either, dear boy! What she wants is the Colonel! (ALLAN *becomes depressed again.*) Raining again, is it? – Well, the handkerchief you can't have! Judith's careful of her belongings and likes her dozen complete! (ALLAN *looks disappointed.*) Yes, you see, that's what Judith is! . . . Now sit down there while I write another letter; then you can take a message for me! (*Goes to the table and writes.*)

★

LIEUTENANT (*comes in at the back with a melancholy air, but without any comic effect. Does not notice ALICE, but goes straight towards ALLAN*). Cadet! (ALLAN *gets up and stands at attention.*) Please don't get up! (ALICE *watches them. The LIEUTENANT goes up to ALLAN and sits down beside him. Sighs, produces a handkerchief like the other one, and wipes his forehead. ALLAN looks greedily at the handker-*

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

chief. The LIEUTENANT looks sadly at ALLAN. ALICE coughs. The LIEUTENANT springs to attention.)

ALICE. Please don't get up!

LIEUTENANT. I beg your pardon, madam!

ALICE. Don't mention it! . . . Do sit down and have a talk with the cadet! He's feeling rather lonely on the island here! (*Goes on writing.*)

LIEUTENANT (*speaking to ALLAN in a low tone, embarrassed*). Frightfully hot, what?

ALLAN. Very!

LIEUTENANT. Finished the sixth book yet?

ALLAN. Just got to the last proposition.

LIEUTENANT. Bit of a teaser, that! (*Silence.*) Have you . . . (*seeking for words*) been playing tennis to-day?

ALLAN. No; too hot in the sun!

LIEUTENANT (*in despair, but without being comic*). Yes, it's frightfully hot to-day!

ALLAN (*in a whisper*). Yes, frightfully! (*Silence.*)

LIEUTENANT. Have you . . . been out sailing to-day?

ALLAN. No, I couldn't get anyone to look after the foresail!

LIEUTENANT. Could you . . . trust *me* to look after it?

ALLAN (*respectfully as before*). That would be too great an honour, Lieutenant!

LIEUTENANT. Oh, not at all! . . . Do you think . . . there'll be a nice breeze to-day, say about noon? that's the only time I'm free!

ALLAN (*slyly*). The wind always drops about noon, and . . . that's the time Miss Judith has her lesson. . . .

LIEUTENANT (*depressed*). Oh, yes, yes! hm! do you think that . . .

*

THE DANCE OF DEATH

ALICE. Would either of you young gentlemen care to take a note for me? (ALLAN and the LIEUTENANT regard each other suspiciously) . . . to Judith! (ALLAN and the LIEUTENANT spring to their feet and hasten towards ALICE, but with a certain dignity intended to conceal their emotions.) Both of you? Well, it's all the more sure to be delivered! (Hands the letter to the LIEUTENANT.) . . . Now, Lieutenant, may I have that handkerchief? My daughter is careful about her washing! She's got a touch of meanness in her character. . . . Give me the handkerchief! . . . I don't want to laugh at you, but you mustn't make yourselves ridiculous, unnecessarily. Moreover, the Colonel doesn't like the part of Othello! (Takes the handkerchief.) Now, young men, be off, and try to hide your feelings as best you can! (The LIEUTENANT bows and goes, closely followed by ALLAN.)

ALICE (calls out). Allan!

ALLAN (stopping reluctantly in the doorway). Yes, Aunt!

ALICE. Stay here! Unless you want to do yourself more harm than you can stand!

ALLAN. But he's going!

ALICE. Let him be singed! You take care of yourself!

ALLAN. I don't want to take care of myself!

ALICE. Then you'll be crying later on! and I shall have the trouble of consoling you!

ALLAN. I'd rather go!

ALICE. Go then! But if you come back, young mad-cap, I shall have the right to laugh at you! (ALLAN runs after the LIEUTENANT.)

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

(ALICE goes on writing.)

★

KURT (*coming in*). Alice, I've had an anonymous letter which is worrying me!

ALICE. Have you noticed how, since he stopped wearing his uniform, Edgar has become another man? I should never have believed a coat could make so much difference!

KURT. You didn't answer my question!

ALICE. It wasn't a question! It was a piece of information! What are you afraid of?

KURT. Everything!

ALICE. He went into the town! His journeys to town always result in something dreadful!

KURT. I can take no steps, though; I don't know from what quarter the attack will begin!

ALICE (*folding up her letter*). We'll see whether I've guessed that! . . .

KURT. Will you help me then?

ALICE. Yes! . . . but no further than my interests permit! mine—that is to say, my children's!

KURT. I understand! . . . Listen! how quiet everything is, in nature, on the sea, everywhere!

ALICE. But beyond the silence I hear voices . . . murmurs, cries!

KURT. Hush! I hear something too! . . . No, it was only the sea-gulls!

ALICE. I hear something else! . . . And now I'm going to the post . . . with this letter!

(*The same setting. ALLAN is sitting at the writing-table, working. JUDITH is standing in the doorway, wearing a tennis hat and carrying the handle-bar of a bicycle.*)

JUDITH. May I borrow your spanner?

ALLAN (*without looking up*). No, you mayn't.

JUDITH. Now you're being rude, the moment I begin running after you!

ALLAN (*not snappily*). I'm being nothing at all: I merely ask to be left in peace!

JUDITH (*coming forward*). Allan!

ALLAN. Well, what is it?

JUDITH. You mustn't be angry with me!

ALLAN. I'm not!

JUDITH. Shake hands then!

ALLAN (*gently*). I don't want to shake hands, but I'm not angry! . . . What is it you really want with me?

JUDITH. You are so stupid!

ALLAN. Very likely!

JUDITH. You think I'm cruel and nothing else!

ALLAN. No, I know you're nice too! You *can* be nice!

JUDITH. Well, it isn't my fault . . . that . . . you and the Lieutenant go and cry in the woods. What do you cry for? tell me! (*ALLAN is embarrassed.*) Tell me now! . . . I never cry. And how is it you two are such friends now? . . . What do you talk about when you're walking arm in arm? (*ALLAN is at a loss for a reply.*) Allan! you shall soon see who I am, and that I can strike a blow for anyone I care about! . . . And one

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

piece of advice I will give you . . . though I don't want to tell tales! . . . Be prepared!

ALLAN. For what?

JUDITH. For trouble!

ALLAN. Where from?

JUDITH. From where you least expect it!

ALLAN. I'm fairly well used to disagreeable things: I haven't had a particularly pleasant life. What's coming now?

JUDITH (*thoughtfully*). You poor boy! . . . give me your hand! (ALLAN *gives her his hand*.) Look at me! . . . Don't you dare to look at me? (ALLAN *hurries out to the left in order to conceal his emotion*.)

*

LIEUTENANT (*coming in at back*). I beg your pardon! I thought the cadet . . .

JUDITH. Lieutenant! Will you be my friend and confidant!

LIEUTENANT. If you will honour me . . .

JUDITH. Yes! . . . Just one word! Don't desert Allan when misfortune comes!

LIEUTENANT. What misfortune?

JUDITH. You'll see soon – perhaps to-day! . . . Do you like Allan?

LIEUTENANT. That young fellow is my best pupil; I esteem him personally too on account of his strength of character. . . . Yes, life has moments when one needs – (*emphatically*) – strength to bear, to endure, in one word – to suffer.

JUDITH. That was more than one word! . . . However, you like Allan!

THE DANCE OF DEATH

LIEUTENANT. Yes!

JUDITH. Go and see him and make friends with him. . . .

LIEUTENANT. That's what I came for – that and nothing else! I had no other object in my call!

JUDITH. I never dreamt of anything of the sort – the sort of thing you mean! . . . Allan went out that way (*pointing left*).

LIEUTENANT (*reluctantly going out to the left*). Very well . . . I'll do it!

JUDITH. Yes, please do!

★

ALICE (*coming in at the back*). What are you doing here?

JUDITH. I wanted to borrow a spanner!

ALICE. Will you listen to me for a moment?

JUDITH. Of course I will! (ALICE *sits down on the sofa*. JUDITH *remains standing*.) But say quickly whatever you have to say. I don't like long lectures.

ALICE. Lectures? . . . Very well! put up your hair and wear a long skirt.

JUDITH. Why?

ALICE. Because you're no longer a child! And you're too young to have to make yourself out younger than you are!

JUDITH. What does that mean?

ALICE. That you're of marriageable age! and that your way of dressing shocks people!

JUDITH. All right, I'll do it!

ALICE. You understand then?

JUDITH. Oh, yes!

ALICE. And we're agreed?

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

JUDITH. Entirely!

ALICE. On all points!

JUDITH. Even the sorest!

ALICE. Will you at the same time stop playing – with Allan?

JUDITH. It's to be serious then?

ALICE. Yes!

JUDITH. Then we may as well start at once. (*She has put down the handle-bar, and now lets down her bicycle-skirt and twists her hair into a knot, fastening it with a hairpin which she takes out of her mother's hair.*)

ALICE. It isn't usual to dress in other people's drawing-rooms!

JUDITH. Do I look all right? . . . Now I'm ready! Come now who dares!

ALICE. You look decent now anyway! . . . And now leave Allan in peace!

JUDITH. I don't understand what you mean.

ALICE. Don't you see he's miserable. . . .

JUDITH. Yes, I think I've noticed it; but I don't know why. *I'm not miserable!*

ALICE. That's your strength! But wait a little . . . ah, yes! one day you'll get to know what it means! . . . Now go home, and don't forget . . . that you're wearing a long skirt.

JUDITH. Does one have to walk differently then?

ALICE. Try!

JUDITH (*tries to walk like a grown-up lady*). Oh! I've got chains on my feet! I'm all entangled! I can't run now!

ALICE. Yes, child: now begins the walk, along the dreary road toward the unknown, which one knows

THE DANCE OF DEATH

beforehand, and yet must pretend not to know! . . . Shorter steps, and slower, much slower! Children's shoes must go, Judith: you must have boots now! — You don't remember giving up socks and having shoes; but I do!

JUDITH. I'll never be able to stand this!

ALICE. And yet you must! you must!

JUDITH (*goes up to her mother and kisses her lightly on the cheek; then goes out in a dignified manner like a lady, but forgets to take the handle-bar*). Good-bye!

★

KURT (*coming in from the right*). Here already!

ALICE. Yes!

KURT. Is *he* back?

ALICE. Yes!

KURT. What did he look like?

ALICE. In full dress! — so he's been calling on the Colonel. Two orders on his breast.

KURT. Two? — I knew he was to get the Order of the Sword on retirement. What's the other?

ALICE. I don't understand these things: it was a white cross inside a red one.

KURT. It must be Portuguese! . . . let me think! — Ah! — didn't his articles in the paper treat of quarantine stations in Portuguese harbours?

ALICE. Yes — so far as I remember!

KURT. And he's never been in Portugal?

ALICE. Never!

KURT. And I have!

ALICE. Why do you give yourself away so? He hears everything, and his memory is wonderful!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

KURT. Don't you think Judith got this distinction for him?

ALICE. Well really! . . . There are limits . . . (*gets up*). And you have passed them!

KURT. Must we quarrel then?

ALICE. That depends on you! Don't meddle with my interests!

KURT. If they cross mine, I have to meddle with them, however lightly. . . . There he comes!

ALICE. Now it's going to happen!

KURT. What – is going to happen?

ALICE. We shall see!

KURT. I hope it comes to a direct attack; this state of siege has got on my nerves! I haven't a friend left on the whole island!

ALICE. Hush! quick! . . . You sit this side . . . he'll take the arm-chair of course: then I can prompt you!

★

CAPTAIN (*comes in at the back, in full dress uniform, wearing the Order of the Sword and the Portuguese Order of Christ*). Good morning! – So this is the meeting-place!

ALICE. You're tired! sit down! (*Contrary to expectation the CAPTAIN sits on the sofa, left.*) Make yourself comfortable!

CAPTAIN. This is all right! – you're too kind!

ALICE (*to KURT*). Be careful! he suspects us!

CAPTAIN (*angrily*). What's that you said?

ALICE (*to KURT*). He's probably been drinking.

CAPTAIN (*rudely*). No, he has not! (*Silence.*) Well? . . . how have you been amusing yourselves?

ALICE. And you?

THE DANCE OF DEATH

CAPTAIN. Are you looking at my orders?

ALICE. No-o!

CAPTAIN. So I imagine. You're jealous. — Usually one congratulates a person on the distinctions conferred on him!

ALICE. Please accept our congratulations!

CAPTAIN. We get this sort of thing instead of the laurel wreaths they give to actresses!

ALICE. That's one for the wreaths on the fortress walls at home . . .

CAPTAIN. Which your brother gave you. . . .

ALICE. Oh, be quiet, do!

CAPTAIN. And before which I have had to bow down for twenty-five years! . . . and which have taken me twenty-five years to unmask!

ALICE. Have you met my brother?

CAPTAIN. Good heavens, yes! (ALICE is crushed. Silence.) Well, Kurt! You're not saying much, are you?

KURT. I am waiting!

CAPTAIN. Well now! I suppose you've heard the great news?

KURT. No!

CAPTAIN. Well, I don't like having to be the one to tell you. . . .

KURT. Out with it!

CAPTAIN. The soda-factory has gone to smash!

KURT. Very unpleasant news! — And how does it affect you?

CAPTAIN. Not at all badly: I sold out in time!

KURT. That was wise of you!

CAPTAIN. But how about you?

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

KURT. Bad!

CAPTAIN. It's your own fault! You ought to have sold out in time, or taken up new shares.

KURT. I should merely have lost them as well.

CAPTAIN. Not at all! If you had subscribed, the company would have kept on its legs.

KURT. Not the company – the directors! I regarded that new subscription as a collection for their benefit!

CAPTAIN. Can that idea save you? That's the question!

KURT. No; I've got to give up everything!

CAPTAIN. Everything!

KURT. Even my house, the furniture!

CAPTAIN. But this is terrible!

KURT. I've been through worse! (*Silence.*)

CAPTAIN. That's what happens when amateurs will go and speculate.

KURT. You surprise me. You know that if I hadn't subscribed I should have been boycotted. . . . 'More work for the coast population, toilers of the sea, inexhaustible capital, inexhaustible as the ocean . . . philanthropy and national profit' . . . That's what you wrote, and had printed! . . . and now you call it speculation!

CAPTAIN (*undisturbed*). What are you thinking of doing now?

KURT. I suppose I must have an auction!

CAPTAIN. A very wise decision!

KURT. What do you mean?

CAPTAIN. What I said! . . . You see – (*slowly*) – there will be certain changes here . . .

KURT. Here on the island?

THE DANCE OF DEATH

CAPTAIN. Yes! . . . For instance . . . your official residence will be exchanged for a simpler one.

KURT. I see!

CAPTAIN. Yes, the intention is to have the quarantine station on the further side of the island, close to the sea!

KURT. My original idea!

CAPTAIN (*dryly*). I know nothing about that. . . . I am not acquainted with your ideas on the subject! . . . However – it's an excellent excuse for getting rid of your furniture at once; then it's more likely to pass by unnoticed – I mean the scandal!

KURT. What?

CAPTAIN. The scandal! (*Working himself up.*) It is a scandal to come to a new place and at once get involved in financial difficulties. It's unpleasant for your relations . . . for them in particular!

KURT. Particularly for me – I should have thought!

CAPTAIN. I'll tell you one thing, my dear Kurt: if you hadn't had me at your side in this affair, you'd have lost your job.

KURT. That too!

CAPTAIN. You find it a little difficult to keep things in order! . . . there have been complaints about your work!

KURT. Justifiable complaints?

CAPTAIN. Tcha! After all – in spite of your other admirable qualities – you are – a slacker! – don't interrupt me! You're a terrible slacker!

KURT. How curious!

CAPTAIN. However! The change we spoke of will

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

probably take place almost immediately! And I wanted to advise you to have the auction at once, or to try to sell privately.

KURT. Privately? where could I find a buyer here?

CAPTAIN. I suppose you don't mean that I'm to go and settle in among your furniture? That would make a fine story – (*jerkily*) hm! especially if one . . . thinks of what happened . . . once upon a time . . .

KURT. What was that? – Do you mean what *didn't* happen?

CAPTAIN (*turning round*). How quiet you are, Alice! what's the matter, old girl? You're not in very good form!

ALICE. I'm just thinking . . .

CAPTAIN. O Lord! thinking, are you? But you'll have to think quickly, correctly and clearly, if it's to do any good! – Now then! one, two, three – think! ha-ha! you can't do it! . . . Very well, then I'll have a shot! . . . Where's Judith?

ALICE. Oh, somewhere about!

CAPTAIN. Where's Allan? (*ALICE says nothing.*) Where's the Lieutenant? (*ALICE says nothing.*) Now, Kurt! What are you thinking of doing with Allan now?

KURT. Doing with him?

CAPTAIN. Yes; you can't afford to keep him in the artillery, can you?

KURT. Perhaps not!

CAPTAIN. You must try and get him into some cheap infantry regiment – up in Norrland or somewhere.

KURT. Norrland?

THE DANCE OF DEATH

CAPTAIN. Yes! or suppose you let him go in for something practical, right away! — If I were in your place I'd put him into an office! . . . Why not? (*KURT says nothing.*) In these enlightened days! tcha! . . . Alice is so *unusually* silent! . . . Yes, my children, this is the swinging see-saw of life: now one's up, looking bravely round: and now one's down, and then one comes up again! and so on! So much for that! yes! . . . (*To ALICE.*) Did you say anything? (*ALICE shakes her head.*) We may expect visitors here in a few days!

ALICE. Were you speaking to me?

CAPTAIN. We may expect visitors in a few days! distinguished visitors!

ALICE. Well, who?

CAPTAIN. Aha! so you're interested! . . . Now you can sit down and guess who's coming; and between your guesses you can read this letter, once again! (*Gives her an opened letter.*)

ALICE. My letter? Opened? back from the post-office?

CAPTAIN (*getting up*). Yes: in my capacity as head of the family, and your guardian, I watch over the family's most sacred interests, and cut short with an iron hand every attempt to loosen family ties by means of a criminal correspondence! Tcha! (*ALICE is crushed.*) I'm not dead, I tell you; but don't get angry just at the moment when I'm trying to raise us all from an undeserved humiliation — undeserved at any rate on my part!

ALICE. Judith! Judith!

CAPTAIN. And Holofernes? — Will that be me? Bah! (*Goes out at back.*)

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

KURT. Who is this man?

ALICE. I don't know!

KURT. We're beaten!

ALICE. Yes! . . . without a doubt!

KURT. As for me, he has gnawed me through and through; but so cunningly that I can't accuse him in any way.

ALICE. Accuse? why you're under an obligation to him!

KURT. Does he know what he's doing?

ALICE. No, I don't believe he does. He follows his nature and instincts, and just now he seems to be in favour where good and bad luck are dealt out.

KURT. I suppose it's the Colonel who's coming here.

ALICE. Probably! And that's why Allan must go!

KURT. You agree to that?

ALICE. Oh, yes!

KURT. Then our ways part!

ALICE (*preparing to go*). For a little while! . . . But we'll meet again!

KURT. Presumably!

ALICE. And do you know where?

KURT. Here!

ALICE. You realize that?

KURT. That's simple! *He* takes the house and buys the furniture!

ALICE. I think so too! But don't desert me!

KURT. Not for a little thing like that!

ALICE. Good afternoon! (*Goes out.*)

KURT. Good afternoon!

(*The same setting, but a cloudy day and rain outside. ALICE and KURT come in at the back, with umbrellas and raincoats.*)

ALICE. So I've got you here! . . . Kurt, I can't be cruel enough to welcome you to your own house. . . .

KURT. Oh, why not? I've gone through three distraints . . . and worse than that . . . *I don't mind!*

ALICE. Did *he* summon you here?

KURT. It was a formal summons, but I don't understand on what grounds!

ALICE. Why, he's not your superior?

KURT. No, but he's set himself up as a king on this island! And if anyone resists him, he's only got to mention the Colonel's name, and they all bow down at once! – By the way, is it to-day the Colonel comes?

ALICE. He's expected – but I don't know anything for certain! Do sit down!

KURT (*sitting down*). Everything's the same here!

ALICE. Don't think about it! – don't tear open the wound!

KURT. Wound? it only seems to me a little strange! Strange as the man himself! – Do you know, when I made his acquaintance as a young man I fled from him . . . But he was after me. Flattered me, offered me his services and put me under obligations. . . . I renewed my efforts to escape, but in vain. . . . Now I'm his slave!

ALICE. Yes, and why? It's he who's indebted to you, while you are the debtor!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

KURT. After my ruin he offered to help Allan with his examination. . . .

ALICE. That will cost you dear! . . . Does your candidacy for Parliament still hold good?

KURT. Yes; and so far as I can see there's nothing in my way! (*Silence.*)

ALICE. Is Allan really leaving to-day?

KURT. Yes – if I can't prevent it!

ALICE. That was a short-lived happiness!

KURT. Short, like everything but life itself; that is terribly long!

ALICE. It is indeed! . . . Won't you come and wait in the morning-room? Even if it doesn't hurt you, it hurts me – these surroundings.

KURT. If *you* wish it!

ALICE. I'm ashamed – I could die of shame . . . but I can't alter things!

KURT. Let's go then! just as you like!

ALICE. There's somebody coming too! (*They go out to the left.*)

*

(*The CAPTAIN and ALLAN come in at the back, both in uniform, wearing cloaks.*)

CAPTAIN. Sit down here, my boy: I want to have a talk with you! (*Sits in the arm-chair. ALLAN sits on the chair, left.*) It's raining to-day, or I should enjoy myself sitting here looking at the sea. (*Silence.*) Well? – So you don't want to go?

ALLAN. I don't like leaving my father!

CAPTAIN. Oh, your father! he's rather an unfortunate

THE DANCE OF DEATH

man! (*Silence.*) And parents seldom understand what's best for their children! That is to say – there are exceptions of course! hm! Tell me, Allan! do you have any dealings with your mother?

ALLAN. Yes, she writes occasionally!

CAPTAIN. You know she's your guardian?

ALLAN. Oh, yes!

CAPTAIN. Now, Allan! Did you know your mother had given me full power to act on her behalf?

ALLAN. No, I didn't know that!

CAPTAIN. You know it now, then! and that is why all discussion about your career is ended! . . . So you'll go to Norrland?

ALLAN. But I haven't got the money.

CAPTAIN. I've seen to that!

ALLAN. Then all I can do is to thank you, Uncle!

CAPTAIN. You're grateful, you are! it's not everybody that is! hm! . . . (*Raising his voice.*) The Colonel . . . you know the Colonel?

ALLAN (*embarrassed*). No, I don't.

CAPTAIN. The – Col-onel – (*accenting each syllable*) – is my particular friend – (*more quickly*) as perhaps you know! hm! The Colonel has been kind enough to take an interest in my family, including my wife's relations. The Colonel, through his intervention, has been able to supply the money needed for the completion of your course! – Now you know your obligations, and your father's obligations – to the Colonel! . . . Do I make myself clear? (*ALLAN inclines his head.*) Now go and pack your things! The money will be handed to you on

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

the gangway! Well, good-bye, my boy! (*Holds out one finger.*) Good-bye! (*Gets up and goes out to the right.*)

*

(ALLAN, alone, stands looking sadly about the room.)

JUDITH (*comes in at the back, with hooded cloak and umbrella; in other respects she is beautifully dressed, wears a long skirt and has her hair up*). Is that you, Allan?

ALLAN (*turns round and examines JUDITH carefully*). Is that you, Judith?

JUDITH. You don't recognize me? But where have you been all this time? . . . What are you looking at? — my long skirt . . . and my hair . . . You've never seen that before! . . .

ALLAN. Well!

JUDITH. Do I look like a married woman? (ALLAN turns away.) (*Seriously.*) What are you doing here?

ALLAN. I've been saying good-bye!

JUDITH. What! are you — leaving?

ALLAN. I'm transferred to Norrland.

JUDITH (*dumbfounded*). To Norrland? — When do you start?

ALLAN. To-day!

JUDITH. Whose idea is that?

ALLAN. Your father's!

JUDITH. So I should have thought! (*Walks up and down, stamping her feet.*) I wish you hadn't got to go to-day!

ALLAN. So as to meet the Colonel!

JUDITH. What do you know about the Colonel? . . . Is it certain you're going?

THE DANCE OF DEATH

ALLAN. I've no choice in the matter! And now I want to go myself. (*Silence.*)

JUDITH. Why do you want to go now?

ALLAN. I want to get away! Out, into the world!

JUDITH. It's too cramped here! Yes, I understand, Allan: it is unbearable!—People speculate—in soda, and in human beings! (*Silence.*) (*With genuine feeling.*) Allan! I have always been, as you know, one of those lucky people who cannot suffer: but now—I'm beginning to know what it is!

ALLAN. You are?

JUDITH. Yes!—now I'm beginning! (*She presses both hands to her breast.*) Oh, what agony! Oh! . . .

ALLAN. What is it?

JUDITH. I don't know!—I'm being suffocated! I think I'm dying!

ALLAN. Judith!

JUDITH (*screaming*). Oh! . . . is *this* how it feels? is this . . . oh, poor boys!

ALLAN. I should jeer at you, if I were as cruel as you are!

JUDITH. I'm not cruel, but I didn't know better! . . . You mustn't go!

ALLAN. I have to!

JUDITH. Go then! . . . but give me something to remember you by!

ALLAN. What have I to give you?

JUDITH (*with deep and genuine feeling*). You! . . . No, I *cannot* live through this! (*Cries aloud, clasping her breast.*) The pain, the pain . . . what have you done to me? . . . I don't want to live any longer!—Allan! don't

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

go, not alone! We'll go out together, and we'll take the little cutter, the little white one – and we'll sail out to sea; we'll make fast the sheet – there's a glorious breeze – and so we'll sail on till we go down – right out there, far away, where there's no goose-grass and no jelly-fish! – Shall we? Answer me! – But we ought to have washed the sails yesterday – they ought to be quite white – I want to see white in that hour – and then you shall swim, with your arm round me till you're tired – and then we'll sink . . . (*Turns round.*) That'll be fine! far finer than being miserable here and smuggling letters which Daddy opens and scoffs at! Allan! (*She seizes him by the arms and shakes him.*) Do you hear me?

ALLAN (*who has been watching her with shining eyes*). Judith! Judith! why didn't you say all this before?

JUDITH. Why, I didn't know! how could I say what I didn't know?

ALLAN. And now I've got to leave you! . . . But, I suppose it's the best and the only way! I can't compete with a man . . . who . . .

JUDITH. Don't talk about the Colonel!

ALLAN. Isn't it true?

JUDITH. It's true – and it's untrue!

ALLAN. Can't you make it quite untrue?

JUDITH. Yes, it shall be so now! Within an hour!

ALLAN. Will you keep your word? I can wait, and endure, and work . . . Judith!

JUDITH. Don't go yet! – How long shall I have to wait?

ALLAN. A year!

THE DANCE OF DEATH

JUDITH (*overjoyed*). One? I'll wait a thousand years: and if you don't come, then I'll turn the vault of heaven upside down till the sun rises in the west . . . Hush! Somebody's coming! — Allan, we must part . . . Hush! — Take me in your arms! (*They embrace.*) But you mustn't kiss me! (*Turns her head away.*) There! go now! — go!

ALLAN (*goes towards back and puts on his cloak. Then they rush into each other's arms, so that JUDITH disappears beneath the cloak, and they kiss for one moment. ALLAN rushes out. JUDITH throws herself face downward on the sofa and sobs. ALLAN returns and falls on his knees by the sofa*). No, I can't go! I can't leave you — not now, not now!

JUDITH (*getting up*). If you only knew how beautiful you are now! if you could only see yourself!

ALLAN. No, no! a man can't be beautiful! But you, Judith! You — that you! . . . Oh, I know when you're nice you seem like another Judith . . . my own! . . . But if you deceive me now, I shall die!

JUDITH. I think I shall die anyhow! . . . Oh, if I could only die now, this moment, while I'm so happy! . . .

ALLAN. Somebody's coming!

JUDITH. Let them come! I'm afraid of nothing in the whole world — not now! But I wish you could take me under your cloak. (*She pretends to hide under his cloak.*) Then I'd fly with you to Norrland. What shall we do in Norrland? Join the Light Infantry . . . the sort that wear feathers in their caps . . . they look fine and will suit you splendidly. (*Plays with his hair. ALLAN kisses the tips of her fingers — one after the other, and then her boots.*)

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

JUDITH. What are you doing, you silly boy? You'll get your lips all black! (*Gets up hastily.*) . . . And then I shan't be able to kiss you when you go! . . . Come, and I'll go with you!

ALLAN. No, I should be put under arrest!

JUDITH. I'll go with you there too!

ALLAN. They wouldn't let you! . . . Now we must part!

JUDITH. I shall swim after the steamer . . . and then you'll jump in and rescue me, and it'll get into the paper, and then we can be engaged! Shall we do that?

ALLAN. You can still make jokes, can you?

JUDITH. There's always time for tears! . . . Say good-bye now! . . . (*They rush into each other's arms; then ALLAN withdraws through the door at back, which remains open, and they embrace outside in the rain.*)

ALLAN. The rain's pouring down on you, Judith!

JUDITH. As if I cared! (*They tear themselves away from each other. ALLAN goes: JUDITH remains standing in the rain and wind, which plays havoc with her hair and clothes while she waves her handkerchief. Then she rushes into the room again and throws herself on the sofa, her face buried in her hands.*)

*

ALICE (*comes in and goes up to JUDITH*). What's this? . . . Are you ill? – Get up and let me have a look at you! (*JUDITH gets up. ALICE looks at her carefully.*) You're not ill! . . . But I'm not going to console you! (*Goes out to the right.*)

*

(*The LIEUTENANT comes in at the back.*)

THE DANCE OF DEATH

JUDITH (*gets up and puts on her hooded cloak*). Will you come to the telegraph office with me?

LIEUTENANT. If I can be of any service . . . but I don't think it's quite proper!

JUDITH. So much the better! I want you to compromise me – but without any illusions! . . . You go first! (*They go out at the back.*)

★

(*The CAPTAIN and ALICE come in from the right, the CAPTAIN in undress uniform.*)

CAPTAIN (*sitting in the arm-chair*). Let him in! (*ALICE goes and opens door on the left and then sits down on the sofa.*)

KURT (*coming in from the left*). You wish to speak to me?

CAPTAIN (*in a friendly but rather patronizing tone*). Yes, I have several important things to tell you! – Sit down!

KURT (*sits on chair left*). I am all ears!

CAPTAIN. Very well then! . . . (*Bombastically.*) You are aware that our quarantine system has been going to rack and ruin for nearly a century . . . hm!

ALICE (*to KURT*). Hark to the candidate speaking!

CAPTAIN. But – with the unprecedented development which we see nowadays in . . .

ALICE (*to KURT*). Means of communication of course!

CAPTAIN. . . . In all possible respects, the Government has been considering a policy of expansion. With that object the Health Commissioners have appointed Inspectors – and!

ALICE (*to KURT*). He's giving dictation . . .

CAPTAIN. . . . You may as well hear it now as later!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

I have been appointed an Inspector of Quarantines!
(*Silence.*)

KURT. I congratulate you – and pay my respects at the same time!

CAPTAIN. In consideration of the ties of kinship which exist between us our personal relations will remain unaltered! However, to change the subject, your son Allan has, at my request, been transferred to an infantry regiment in Norrland!

KURT. But I won't have that!

CAPTAIN. Your wishes in the matter are subordinate to those of the mother . . . and since the mother has given me full power to decide, I have come to the above-mentioned decision!

KURT. I admire you!

CAPTAIN. Is that all you feel at the very moment when you're about to part from your son? Have you no other purely human feelings?

KURT. You mean I ought to be suffering?

CAPTAIN. Yes!

KURT. It would please you if I suffered. You want me to be able to suffer!

CAPTAIN. Are you really capable of suffering? I was ill once – you were present . . . and I can only remember that your face showed unfeigned pleasure!

ALICE. That is not true! Kurt sat up with you all night, and soothed you when your pangs of conscience became unendurable . . . but when you recovered you were ungrateful . . .

CAPTAIN (*pretending not to hear her*). Allan accordingly must leave us!

THE DANCE OF DEATH

KURT. Who will provide the money?

CAPTAIN. "That I have already done: that is to say, we – a syndicate who have interested ourselves in the young man's future!

KURT. A syndicate!

CAPTAIN. Yes! – And to make sure that it's all right you may have a look at these lists. (*Hands him some papers.*)

KURT. Lists? (*Reads the papers.*) Why, they're begging lists!

CAPTAIN. Call them what you please!

KURT. Have you been begging on behalf of my son?

CAPTAIN. Ungrateful again! – an ungrateful person is the heaviest burden the earth bears!

KURT. Socially then I am dead! . . . and my candidacy is done for! . . .

CAPTAIN. What candidacy!

KURT. Why, for Parliament!

CAPTAIN. Surely you never dreamt of anything of that sort! . . . Particularly as you might have guessed that I, as the older resident, intended to offer my own services, which you appear to have under-estimated!

KURT. Oh, well! so that's finished too!

CAPTAIN. It doesn't seem to affect you much!

KURT. You have taken everything now! Is there anything more you want?

CAPTAIN. Have you anything more? And have you anything to reproach me with? Think carefully – have you anything to reproach me with? (*Silence.*)

KURT. Strictly speaking – nothing! everything has

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

been done correctly and lawfully, as between honest citizens in everyday life! . . .

CAPTAIN. You speak with a resignation which I should call cynical. But your whole nature, my dear Kurt, has a cynical bent, and there are moments when I might be tempted to share Alice's opinion of you – that you are a hypocrite, a hypocrite of the first rank!

KURT (*calmly*). Is that Alice's opinion?

ALICE (*to KURT*). It was, once! But is so no longer; for to bear what you have borne takes sheer heroism, or – something else!

CAPTAIN. I think the discussion may now be regarded as closed. Kurt, you'd better go and say good-bye to Allan; he sails by the next boat!

KURT (*getting up*). So soon? . . . Well, I've been through worse than this!

CAPTAIN. Yes, you say that so often that I'm beginning to wonder what you really were up to in America.

KURT. What I was up to? Why, I had misfortunes! And to meet with misfortune is the incontestable right of every human being.

CAPTAIN (*sharply*). There are misfortunes of our own making: were they of that kind?

KURT. Isn't that a question of conscience?

CAPTAIN (*curtly*). Have *you* a conscience?

KURT. There are wolves, and there are sheep. Men don't count it an honour to be a sheep! Still I'd rather be that than a wolf!

CAPTAIN. You don't recognize the old truth, that every man is the architect of his own fortune?

KURT. Is that true?

THE DANCE OF DEATH

CAPTAIN. And you don't know that a man's own strength . . .

KURT. Oh, I know all about that, ever since the night when *your* own strength deserted you and left you lying on the floor!

CAPTAIN (*raising his voice*). A deserving man like your humble servant – yes, look at me – I have fought for fifty years – against a world of foes; but at last I've won the game, through perseverance, through loyalty, through energy and – through integrity!

ALICE. You should leave that for other people to say!

CAPTAIN. Other people won't say it, because they're jealous! – However, we're expecting visitors! My daughter Judith is meeting her fiancé to-day . . . Where is Judith?

ALICE. She's out!

CAPTAIN. In the rain? . . . Send for her!

KURT. Perhaps I may go now?

CAPTAIN. No, stay! . . . Is Judith dressed? Decently?

ALICE. Oh, fairly. . . . Did the Colonel say for certain he was coming?

CAPTAIN (*getting up*). Yes: that is to say, he's going to pay us a surprise visit as they call it! . . . And I'm expecting a telegram from him – any moment! – (*Going out to the right.*) I'll be back in a minute!

*

ALICE. There you have the man! Is he a human being?

KURT. Last time you asked me that, I answered, no! Now I believe he's the commonest type of them that possess the earth . . . perhaps we are a little like that

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

too? making use of our fellow-creatures and of favourable opportunities!

ALICE. He has eaten you, and yours, alive . . . and you stick up for him?

KURT. I've been through worse. . . . But this man-eater has left my soul untouched:—that he could not devour!

ALICE. What 'worse' have you been through?

KURT. Do *you* ask that? . . .

ALICE. Are you being rude?

KURT. No, I don't want to be, and for that reason . . . don't ask me again!

★

CAPTAIN (*coming in from the right*). The telegram was there, you see!—Kindly read it, Alice: my sight is so bad! . . . (*Sits pompously in the arm-chair.*) . . . Read it!—You needn't go, Kurt! (*ALICE reads it rapidly to herself; she looks confused.*) We-ell? aren't you pleased? (*ALICE does not speak, but fixes her eyes on the CAPTAIN.*) (*Ironically*) Who is it from?

ALICE. It's from the Colonel!

CAPTAIN (*delighted*). I thought so! . . . And what does the Colonel say?

ALICE. This is what he says: 'On account of Miss Judith's impertinent telephone message I regard our relations as broken off—for good!' (*Looks fixedly at the CAPTAIN.*)

CAPTAIN. Once more, if you please!

ALICE (*reading quickly*). 'On account of Miss Judith's impertinent telephone message I regard our relations broken off—for good!'

THE DANCE OF DEATH

CAPTAIN (*turning pale*). It's Judith!

ALICE. And there is Holofernes!

CAPTAIN. What are you then?

ALICE. That you will soon find out!

CAPTAIN. This is your doing!

ALICE. No!

CAPTAIN (*beside himself*). This is your doing!

ALICE. No! (*The CAPTAIN tries to get up and draw his sword, but falls back, from an apoplectic stroke.*) Now you've got it!

CAPTAIN (*in an old man's tearful voice*). Don't be angry with me! I am so ill!

ALICE. Are you? I'm glad to hear it! . . .

KURT. Let's carry him to bed!

ALICE. No, I won't touch him! (*Rings the bell.*)

CAPTAIN (*as before*). You mustn't be angry with me! (*To KURT.*) Think of my children!

KURT. This is too sublime! I'm to look after his children when he's stolen mine!

ALICE. What self-deception!

CAPTAIN. Think of my children! (*Goes on mumbling unintelligibly*) Blu-blu-blu.

ALICE. At last that tongue is stayed! — it can brag no more, lie no more, wound no more! — You, Kurt, who believe in God, thank Him on my behalf! thank Him for freeing me from the tower, from the wolf, from the vampire!

KURT. No, Alice! don't say that!

ALICE (*with her face close to the CAPTAIN's*). Where now is your own strength? What? And your energy? (*The CAPTAIN, speechless, spits in her face.*) So you can still spit

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

venom, you viper! Then I'll tear the tongue from your throat! (*Strikes him on the ear.*) The head is off, but it still goes red! . . . O Judith, glorious girl, whom I bore like vengeance beneath my heart! You, you have set us free, all of us! – If you've any more heads, hydra, we'll take them too! (*Pulls his beard.*) To think that there is justice on earth! Sometimes I dreamt it, but I never believed it! Kurt, ask God to forgive me for misjudging Him! Oh, there is justice! Then I, too, will become a sheep! Tell Him that, Kurt! A little success is good for us; it's adversity that turns us into wolves!

★

(*The LIEUTENANT comes in at the back.*)

ALICE. The Captain has had a stroke. Please help us to wheel out the chair!

LIEUTENANT. Madam! . . .

ALICE. What is it?

LIEUTENANT. Well, Miss Judith . . .

ALICE. Help us here first! you can tell us about Judith afterwards! (*The LIEUTENANT wheels the chair out to the right.*) Out with the carcass! out with him, and throw open the doors! the place must be aired! (*Throws open the doors in the background. It has cleared up outside.*) Ouf! . . .

KURT. Are you going to desert him?

ALICE. One does desert a stranded vessel: the crew save their lives! . . . It isn't my business to lay out a rotting beast! Skinners and scavengers can look after him! A garden bed is too nice a thing to get such a barrow-load of filth! . . . Now I'm going to have a

THE DANCE OF DEATH

bath and clean off all this dirt, if I ever can be clean again!

(JUDITH is seen out on the balustrade, bareheaded, waving her handkerchief towards the sea.)

KURT (*going towards door at back*). Who is that? Judith!
(*Calls out*) Judith!

*

JUDITH (*comes in, crying out*). He's gone!

KURT. Who?

JUDITH. Allan's gone!

KURT. Without saying good-bye?

JUDITH. We said good-bye: and he sent you his love, Uncle!

ALICE. Oh, that's how it was?

JUDITH (*throwing herself into KURT's arms*). He's gone!

KURT. He'll come back, dear!

ALICE. Or we'll follow him!

KURT (*pointing to door right*). And leave him? – The world . . .

ALICE. The world! bah! . . . Judith, come and kiss me! (JUDITH goes up to ALICE, who kisses her on the forehead.)
Do you want to go after him?

JUDITH. Need you ask?

ALICE. But your father is ill?

JUDITH. What does that matter?

ALICE. That's my Judith! – Oh, Judith, how I love you!

JUDITH. Besides, Daddy isn't mean . . . and he doesn't like being fussed over! There's some style about Daddy, whatever you say!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

ALICE. In a way – yes!

JUDITH. And I fancy he isn't exactly longing for me – since that telephone business! . . . And why should he want to saddle me with an old fellow like that? No! Allan, Allan! (*Throws herself into KURT's arms.*) I want to go to Allan! (*Tears herself free and runs out to wave. KURT follows her and waves too.*)

ALICE. How strange that flowers should grow out of filth!

*

(*The LIEUTENANT comes in from the right.*)

ALICE. Well?

LIEUTENANT. Yes; Miss Judith . . .

ALICE. Is it so sweet to feel the letters of her name caressing your lips that you forget the dying man?

LIEUTENANT. Well, but she said . . .

ALICE. She? – call her Judith rather than that! – But first of all, what's happening in there?

LIEUTENANT. Oh, there! . . . it's all over!

ALICE. All over? – O God, I thank Thee on my behalf and that of all mankind, that Thou hast freed us from this evil! . . . Give me your arm! I want to go out and breathe. – Breathe! (*The LIEUTENANT offers his arm.*) (*Checking herself*) Did he say anything before he died?

LIEUTENANT. Miss Judith's father said a few words!

ALICE. What did he say?

LIEUTENANT. He said, 'Forgive them, for they know not what they do.'

ALICE. Incredible!

THE DANCE OF DEATH

LIEUTENANT. Yes, Miss Judith's father was a good and noble man.

ALICE. Kurt!

*

(KURT comes in at the back.)

ALICE. It's over!

KURT. Ah! . . .

ALICE. Do you know what his last words were? No, you couldn't. 'Forgive them, for they know not what they do.' . . .

KURT. Can you translate that?

ALICE. I suppose he meant that *he'd* always done right, and died as one who had been wronged by life.

KURT. I suppose there'll be a nice funeral sermon!

ALICE. And heaps of wreaths! – from the N.C.O.s.

KURT. Yes!

ALICE. A year ago he said something of this kind: It looks as if life for us were some colossal jest!

KURT. Do you think he jested with us when he was dying?

ALICE. No! . . . But now that he's dead I feel a strange desire to speak well of him!

KURT. Let's do so then!

LIEUTENANT. Miss Judith's father was a good and noble man!

ALICE (*to* KURT). You hear that?

KURT. 'They know not what they do!' How often I've asked you if he knew what he was doing! And you thought he didn't! Come then – forgive him!

ALICE. Riddles! riddles! . . . But just think of it –

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

peace in the house now! The wonderful peace of death! wonderful as that solemn restlessness when a child comes into the world! I can hear the silence . . . and I see on the floor the marks of the chair which carried him away. – I feel that my own life is ended now, and that I am on the road to dissolution! . . . It's strange, you know, but the Lieutenant's simple words – and he is a simple soul – pursue me still; but now I see a new meaning in them. My husband, my youth's beloved – yes, you laugh? – he *was* a good and noble man – in spite of everything!

KURT. In spite of everything? And a brave man too – what a fight for his own existence and his family's!

ALICE. What worries! what humiliations! Which he cancelled – so as to be able to pass on!

KURT. He was one who had been *passed over*! That means much! Go in, Alice!

ALICE. No! I can't do it! While we were talking here, the image of him as he was in his youth rose up before me. I saw him – I see him – now, just as he was when he was twenty! . . . I must have loved that man!

KURT. And hated!

ALICE. *And hated! . . . Peace be with him! (Goes towards the door on the right, and pauses there, with folded hands.)*

CURTAIN

THE GHOST SONATA

Written 1907

Translated by

ERIK PALMSTIERNA AND JAMES

BERNARD FAGAN

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

THE OLD MAN, Mr. Hummel, a Merchant.

ARKENHOLTZ, a Student.

THE MILKMAID, a Vision.

THE JANITRESS.

THE JANITOR.

THE DEAD MAN, a Consul.

THE LADY IN BLACK, the daughter of the Janitress and
the Dead Man.

THE COLONEL.

THE MUMMY, the Colonel's wife.

HIS DAUGHTER, the daughter of the Old Man.

THE NOBLEMAN, called Baron Skanskorg. Engaged to
the daughter of the Janitress.

JOHANSSON, a Servant of Mr. Hummel.

BENGTTSSON, the Colonel's valet.

THE FIANCÉE, Mr. Hummel's former fiancée, a white-
haired old woman.

SCENE 1

SCENE: *The ground floor and first floor of the façade of a modern house, but only the corner of the house which on the ground floor terminates in a round drawing-room, above which, on the first floor, is a balcony with a flagstaff.*

Through the open windows of the drawing-room is visible, when the blinds are up, a white marble statue of a young woman, surrounded by palms, and strongly illumined by the sunlight. In the window to the left are to be seen pots of hyacinths (blue, white and pink).

On the balcony rail on the first floor in the corner, a blue silk bed quilt and two white pillows. The windows to the left are hung with white sheets. It is a bright Sunday morning.

In the foreground in front of the house is a green bench.

To the right in the foreground a street fountain, to the left an advertisement column.

In the background to the left the front door, showing the staircase with steps of white marble and banister of brass with a mahogany rail; on both sides of the door on the pavement stand tubs with laurels.

The round drawing-room at the corner looks out also on a side street which is supposed to lead in towards the background.

To the left of the front door is a window, on the ground floor, with a window mirror.

As the curtain rises, several distant church bells ring.

The doors in the façade are open: a woman dressed in dark clothes stands motionless on the steps.

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

The JANITRESS sweeps the entrance hall, then she rubs the brass on the door, and waters the laurels.

By the advertisement column sits the OLD MAN in a wheeled chair, reading a newspaper: he has white hair and beard and spectacles.

The MILKMAID enters from the corner with bottles in a wire basket, she wears summer clothes, with brown shoes, black stockings and a white cap; she takes off her cap and hangs it on the fountain; wipes the perspiration from her forehead; takes a drink from the cup, washes her hands and arranges her hair, mirroring herself in the water.

The bell of a steamer is heard to ring, and the bass notes of an organ in a neighbouring church pierce the silence now and then.

After a couple of minutes' silence, when the girl has finished her toilet, the STUDENT enters from the left; he has had a sleepless night and is unshaven. He goes straight to the fountain.

(Pause.)

STUDENT. May I have the cup?

(The MILKMAID draws the cup towards her.)

Haven't you nearly finished?

(The MILKMAID looks at him with horror.)

OLD MAN *(to himself)*. Who is he talking to? – I don't see anybody! – Is he crazy? *(He continues to look at them with great surprise.)*

STUDENT. Why do you stare at me? Do I look so

THE GHOST SONATA

awful? – Well, I've had no sleep. I suppose you think I have been making a night of it. . . .

(The MILKMAID as before.)

You think I've been drinking? – Do I smell of it?

(The MILKMAID as before.)

I know I haven't shaved . . . give me a drink of water, girl, I have earned it! *(Pause.)* Well! Then I suppose I've got to tell you that I spent the whole night dressing wounds and nursing the injured. You see, I was present when that house collapsed last night . . . that's all.

(The MILKMAID rinses the cup, and gives him a drink.)

Thanks!

(The MILKMAID motionless.)

(Slowly.) Would you do me a great favour? *(Pause.)* My eyes are inflamed, as you can see, and my hands have been touching wounds and corpses. To touch my eyes with them would be dangerous. . . . Will you take my handkerchief which is clean, dip it in the fresh water, and bathe my poor eyes with it. – Will you do that? – Won't you act the good Samaritan?

(The MILKMAID hesitates, but does as he has asked.)

Thank you, my dear! *(He takes out his purse.)*

(The MILKMAID makes a deprecatory gesture.)

Pardon my absent-mindedness, I am only half awake. . . .

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

OLD MAN (*to the STUDENT*). Excuse a stranger, but I heard you mention last night's accident . . . I was just reading about it in the paper. . . .

STUDENT. Is it already in the papers?

OLD MAN. All about it. Even your portrait. They greatly regret though that they have not been able to learn the name of the brave young student who did such splendid work. . . .

STUDENT (*glancing at the paper*). That's me! Ha!

OLD MAN. Whom were you talking to just now?

STUDENT. Didn't you see? (*Pause.*)

OLD MAN. What's your name? – Would it be impertinent – to ask – your name?

STUDENT. What does it matter? I don't care for publicity. – Blame is always mixed up with any praise you may get. – To belittle has become an art. – Besides I ask no reward. . . .

OLD MAN. Wealthy are you?

STUDENT. Not at all . . . on the contrary! Poor as a durmouse.

OLD MAN. That's queer. . . . It seems to me as if I had heard that voice. When I was young, I had a friend who always said durmouse instead of dormouse. – Until now he was the one person I had ever heard using that pronunciation. You are the other one. – Is it possible you are a relative of Mr. Arkenholtz, the merchant?

STUDENT. He was my father.

OLD MAN. Strange are the ways of fate. . . . I saw you once when you were an infant, under very trying circumstances. . . .

THE GHOST SONATA

STUDENT. Yes. They say I came into the world in the middle of a bankruptcy. . . .

OLD MAN. Exactly!

STUDENT. May I ask your name?

OLD MAN. I am Mr. Hummel. . . .

STUDENT. You . . . ? Then I remember. . . .

OLD MAN. You have often heard my name mentioned at home? Have you?

STUDENT. Yes!

OLD MAN. And not in a pleasant way, I suppose?

(STUDENT *remains silent.*)

Yes, I should think so! — You were told, I suppose, that I had ruined your father? — All who are ruined by foolish speculations think themselves ruined by the man they tried to fool. (*Pause.*) Now the fact is your father robbed me of seventeen thousand crowns. All my savings at that time.

STUDENT. It is queer how the same story can be told in two quite different ways.

OLD MAN. You don't think I am lying?

STUDENT. How can I tell what to think? My father never lied!

OLD MAN. No, that's right, a father never lies . . . but I, too, am a father, and that is why. . . .

STUDENT. What are you driving at?

OLD MAN. I saved your father from misery, and he repaid me with the ruthless hatred that is born of the obligation to be grateful . . . he taught his family to speak ill of me.

STUDENT. Perhaps you made him ungrateful by

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

poisoning the assistance you gave him with needless humiliation.

OLD MAN. All assistance is humiliating, sir.

STUDENT (*pause*). What do you want from me?

OLD MAN. Not the money back. But if you will render me a small service now and then, I shall consider myself well paid. I am a cripple as you see. Some people say it is my own fault. Others blame my parents. I prefer to blame life itself, with its pitfalls. To escape one of these pitfalls is to walk headlong into another. Asitis, I cannot climb stairs or ring door-bells, therefore I beg you: help me!

STUDENT. What can I do?

OLD MAN. Give my chair a push, to begin with, so that I can read the play-bills on that column. I want to see what they are playing to-night. . . .

STUDENT (*wheels the chair*). Have you no attendant?

OLD MAN. Yes, but he has gone on an errand . . . He'll be back soon . . . Are you a medical student?

STUDENT. No, I am studying languages. What profession to choose, I don't know. . . .

OLD MAN. I see! — Are you good at mathematics?

STUDENT. Not too bad.

OLD MAN. That's good! — Perhaps you would like a job?

STUDENT. Yes, why not?

OLD MAN (*studying the play-bills*). Splendid! They are playing 'The Valkyrie' at the *matinée*. . . . The Colonel will be there and his daughter, and as he always has the end seat in the sixth row, I'll put you next. . . . Will you please go over to that telephone kiosk and order a ticket for seat 82 in the sixth row?

THE GHOST SONATA

STUDENT. Must I go to the Opera in the afternoon?

OLD MAN. Yes! you do as I tell you, and you'll get on! I wish to see you happy, rich and honoured. Your debut last night as the brave reseuer will make you famous by to-morrow, and then your name will be worth a great deal.

STUDENT (*goes to the telephone box*). What a funny adventure. . . .

OLD MAN. Are you a sportsman?

STUDENT. Yes, worse luck. . . .

OLD MAN. Then we'll turn it into better luck! 'Phone up now! (*reads his paper*).

(*The DARK LADY has come out on to the pavement and talks with the JANITRESS. The OLD MAN listens, but the audience hears nothing. The STUDENT re-enters.*)

It is all right?

STUDENT. All right.

OLD MAN. Do you see that house?

STUDENT. Well, yes, I have seen it before . . . I passed it yesterday when the sun was shining on the window-panes – and imagining all the beauty and luxury within – I said to my companion: 'Just think of having a flat up there on the fourth floor, a beautiful young wife, two pretty little children, and twenty thousand crowns a year. . . .'

OLD MAN. So that's what you said? That's what you said? Well! well! I also am very fond of this house. . . .

STUDENT. Do you speculate in houses?

OLD MAN. Mm-yah! But not in the way you mean. . . .

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

STUDENT. Do you know the people who live here?

OLD MAN. All of them. A man of my age knows everybody, including their parents, and grandparents, and one is always related in some way to people. – I am just eighty – but nobody knows *me* – not quite. – Human destinies interest me. . . .

(The blinds of the round drawing-room are drawn up; the COLONEL is seen inside in mufti. After having looked at the thermometer he goes into the room and stands in front of the marble statue.)

Look, that's the Colonel; you will sit next him this afternoon. . . .

STUDENT. Is that – the Colonel? I understand nothing of all this, it's just like a story. . . .

OLD MAN. My whole life has been like a collection of stories, sir. But though the stories are different, they hang together on a common thread, and the dominant theme recurs regularly.

STUDENT. Whom does that statue in there represent?

OLD MAN. His wife, of course. . . .

STUDENT. Was she so lovable then?

OLD MAN. Mm-yah! Yes!

STUDENT. Speak out!

OLD MAN. Oh, we can't judge people, young man! – If I told you that she'd left him, that he beat her, that she returned to him, that she married him a second time, and that *she* is sitting there now like a mummy, worshipping her own statue, then you would think me crazy.

STUDENT. I don't understand!

THE GHOST SONATA

OLD MAN. I thought not! – And there is the window with the hyacinths. His daughter lives there. . . . She is out riding now; she will be home soon. . . .

STUDENT. And who is the Dark Lady, talking to the Janitress?

OLD MAN. Well, that's a bit complicated, but it is connected with the dead man up there, where you see the white sheets. . . .

STUDENT. Who was he then?

OLD MAN. A human being like you or me, but the most conspicuous thing about him was his vanity. . . . If you were a Sunday child you would presently see him come out of that door to look at the flag of the Consulate flying at half-mast. – You see, he was a Consul, and he revelled in coronets and lions and plumed hats and coloured ribbons.

STUDENT. You said Sunday child. – They say I was born on a Sunday. . . .

OLD MAN. No! Were you . . . ? Oh, I should have known . . . the colour of your eyes shows it . . . then you can see what other people can't. Have you noticed anything of that kind?

STUDENT. Of course I don't know what other people see, but at times . . . Oh! One doesn't talk of such things!

OLD MAN. I was almost sure of it, but you can tell me because I – I understand – such things. . . .

STUDENT. Yesterday, for instance . . . I was drawn to that little side street, where the house fell down afterwards. . . . I got there, I stopped in front of that house, which I had never seen before . . . then I

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

noticed a crack in the wall. . . . I could hear floor beams snapping. . . . I rushed forward and picked up a child close to the wall . . . a second later the house came tumbling down . . . I was saved, but in my arms which I thought held the child, there was nothing at all. . . .

OLD MAN. Well! . . . I must say of all the things . . . tell me one thing. Why did you make those gestures by the fountain just now? Why were you talking to yourself?

STUDENT. Didn't you see the Milkmaid I was talking to?

OLD MAN (*horrified*). A milkmaid?

STUDENT. Yes, the girl who handed me the cup.

OLD MAN. Oh! That's how it is? . . . Well, I cannot see things, but there are things I can do.

(A white-haired old lady is now seen to sit down at the window with the window mirror.)

Look at the old woman in the window! Do you see her? – Good! She was my fiancée once upon a time, sixty years ago . . . I was twenty – Never mind, she does not recognize me! We meet every day, and it makes no impression on me, although in those days we had vowed to love each other eternally . . . eternally!

STUDENT. How foolish you were in those old days! We never talk to our girls like that.

OLD MAN. Forgive us, young man! We didn't know any better! – but can't you see that that old woman was once young and pretty?

STUDENT. It doesn't show. Oh! yes, I *feel* she has beautiful eyes, although I cannot see them.

THE GHOST SONATA

(*The JANITRESS comes out with a basket and strews chopped fir branches, as is usual in Sweden when a funeral is to be held.*)

OLD MAN. Ah! The Janitress – Hm! That Dark Lady is her daughter by the man who is dead, and that's why her husband was made Janitor . . . but the Dark Lady has a lover; he is a nobleman with great expectations. He is now getting a divorce from his present wife, who is giving him a big house to get rid of him. This elegant lover is the son-in-law of the dead man, and you can see his bed-clothes being aired on the balcony upstairs . . . that's a bit complicated, I should say!

STUDENT. Yes, it's awfully complicated!

OLD MAN. It certainly is, inside and out, however simple it looks.

STUDENT. But then who was the dead man?

OLD MAN. You've asked me that already, and I answered. If you could look round the corner, where the servants' entrance is, you would see a lot of poor people whom he used to help . . . when he was in the mood. . . .

STUDENT. He was a charitable man, then?

OLD MAN. Yes . . . at times.

STUDENT. Not always?

OLD MAN. No-o! . . . people are like that! Come, sir, turn my chair towards the sun, I feel so cold. You see, the blood congeals, when you can't move about. – Death isn't very far away from me, I know, but I have a few things to do before it comes – hold my hand and feel how cold I am.

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

STUDENT. Yes, yes, terribly. (*He shrinks back.*)

OLD MAN. Don't leave me, I am tired now, and lonely, but I haven't always been like this, you know. I have an enormously long life behind me – enormously long – I have made people unhappy, and people have made me unhappy, and one thing balances the other, but before I die, I want to see you happy . . . our destinies are intertwined through your father – and other things. . . .

STUDENT. But let go my hand, you know you are taking my strength. You are freezing me. What do you want with me?

OLD MAN. Patience, and you'll see and understand. . . . There comes the young lady.

STUDENT. The Colonel's daughter?

OLD MAN. His daughter – yes! Look at her! – did you ever see such a masterpiece?

STUDENT. She resembles the marble statue there. . . .

OLD MAN. It is her mother, you know!

STUDENT. You are right – never did I see such a woman of woman born. – Lucky the man who wins her for a wife and for his home!

OLD MAN. You see it then! – Her beauty is not discovered by everybody . . . so it is written!

(*The YOUNG LADY comes in from the left; she is dressed in modern English riding costume, walks slowly, without noticing anyone, to the door, where she stops to say a few words to the JANTRESS, and enters the house.*)

(*The STUDENT covers his eyes with the hands.*)

OLD MAN. Are you crying?

THE GHOST SONATA

STUDENT. In the face of what is hopeless, is there anything *but* despair?

OLD MAN. I can open doors and hearts, if I only find an arm to do my will . . . serve me, and you shall have power. . . .

STUDENT. Is it then a bargain? Must I sell my soul?

OLD MAN. Don't sell anything! – You see, all my life I have been accustomed to *take*. Now I have a craving to give, – to give! But no one will accept . . . I am rich, very rich, but I have no heirs, except a scamp who is tormenting the life out of me. . . . Become my son; inherit me while I am still alive, enjoy life, and let me look on from a distance, at least.

STUDENT. What am I to do?

OLD MAN. First go and hear 'The Valkyrie'!

STUDENT. That's settled – but what else?

OLD MAN. To-night you shall be in there, in the Round Room!

STUDENT. How shall I get there?

OLD MAN. By means of 'The Valkyrie'!

STUDENT. Why have you chosen me to be your instrument? Did you know me before?

OLD MAN. Of course I did! I have had my eye on you for a long time . . . but now look there at the balcony, the maid is raising the flag to half-mast for the dead Consul . . . and now she turns the mattresses. . . . Do you notice that blue quilt? – It was made to cover two, now it will only cover one. . . .

(The YOUNG LADY appears at her window, having changed her dress in the meantime; she waters the hyacinths.)

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

There is my little girl. Look at her – look! – She is talking to her flowers; isn't she like that blue hyacinth herself? . . . She gives them drink, pure water only – and they transform the water into colour and fragrance. . . . There comes the Colonel with the paper! – He shows her about the house that fell down . . . now he points to your portrait! She is not indifferent . . . she is reading about your brave deed . . . it is clouding over, I think. . . . I wonder if it is going to rain? I shall be in a nice fix then, unless Johansson comes back soon. . . .

(The sun has disappeared, and it is growing darker, the white-haired old woman at the window mirror closes her window.)

Now my fiancée is closing the window . . . seventy-nine years . . . the only mirror she uses is the window mirror, for there she sees not herself, but the world outside – from two angles, but the world can see her, and she hasn't thought of that . . . handsome old lady after all. . . .

(Now the DEAD MAN, wrapped in a winding sheet, comes out of the door.)

STUDENT. Good God, what do I see?

OLD MAN. What *do* you see?

STUDENT. Don't *you* see? In the doorway, the Dead Man?

OLD MAN. I see nothing, but I expected this! Tell me . . .

STUDENT. He comes out into the street. . . . *(Pause.)* Now, he turns his head and looks at the flag.

OLD MAN. What did I say? He will probably count

THE GHOST SONATA

the wreaths; also look at the visiting cards . . . woe to him who is missing!

STUDENT. Now he turns the corner. . . .

OLD MAN. He's going to count the poor at the back door . . . the poor are so decorative, you know: 'Followed by the blessings of many.' Yes, but my blessing he won't get! – Between ourselves – he was a great scoundrel. . . .

STUDENT. But charitable. . . .

OLD MAN. Charitable scoundrel, always thinking of his grand funeral. . . . When he knew his end was near he cheated the State out of fifty thousand crowns. . . . Now his daughter goes about with another woman's husband, and wonders what is in his will. . . . The scoundrel, he can hear every word we say, and he is welcome to it! – There comes Johansson. . . .

(JOHANSSON *enters from the left.*)

OLD MAN. Report!

(JOHANSSON *speaking inaudibly.*)

Not at home you say? You are an ass! – Any telegram? Nothing! . . . Go on! Six o'clock to-night? That's good! – The special edition? – with his name in full! – Arkenholtz, student, born . . . parents . . . splendid! I think it's beginning to rain. . . . What did he really say? So – so! He wouldn't? Well, then he must! – Here comes the nobleman! – Push me round the corner, Johansson, so that I can hear what the poor people say. . . . And, Arkenholtz, wait for me here . . . understand! – Hurry up, hurry up!

(JOHANSSON *wheels the chair round the corner. The STUDENT*

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

remains looking at the YOUNG LADY, who is now loosening the earth in the flower pot. The NOBLEMAN in mourning enters and speaks to the DARK LADY, who has been walking to and fro on the pavement.)

NOBLEMAN. Well! What's to be done? – We've got to wait.

DARK LADY. But I can't wait!

NOBLEMAN. Is that so? Oh, go to the country then!

DARK LADY. I don't want to.

NOBLEMAN. Come this way, or they'll hear what we are saying.

(They move towards the advertising column and continue their talk inaudibly.)

(Enter JOHANSSON from the right, to the STUDENT.)

JOHANSSON. The master asks you, sir, not to forget that other matter!

STUDENT *(slowly)*. Look here – tell me first: who is your master?

JOHANSSON. Well! He is so many things, and has been everything.

STUDENT. Is he in his right mind?

JOHANSSON. Yes, what is *that*? – All his life he has been looking for a Sunday child he says, but that may be a lie.

STUDENT. What does he want? Is he avaricious?

JOHANSSON. He wants power . . . The whole day long he travels about in his chariot like the Thunder God himself . . . He looks at houses, tears them down, opens up new streets, builds new squares . . . but he also breaks into houses, sneaks through windows, plays

THE GHOST SONATA

havoc with human destinies, kills his enemies, and never forgives. — Can you imagine, sir, that this crippled thing was once a Don Juan, but one who never kept his women?

STUDENT. How can that be?

JOHANSSON. He is so full of guile that he makes the women leave him when he is tired of them . . . meanwhile, he is like a horse thief on the human market, he steals human beings in all kinds of ways . . . Why, he has literally stolen me out of the hands of the law . . . You see, I had been guilty of a slip which he alone knew of. Instead of putting me in jail, he made me a slave. I slave and get only my food, not a bit too good either . . .

STUDENT. What does he want to do in this house then?

JOHANSSON. Well, that I won't say! It is so complicated.

STUDENT. I think I'd better get away from this. . . .

JOHANSSON. Look! The young lady has dropped her bracelet out of the window. . . .

(The YOUNG LADY drops a bracelet out of the open window.

The STUDENT advances slowly, picks up the bracelet and hands it to the YOUNG LADY, who thanks him stiffly.

The STUDENT goes back to JOHANSSON.)

So you mean to get away? . . . That is not so easy as one might think, when *he* has got his net over one's head . . . And he fears nothing between heaven and earth . . . Yes, one thing . . . or rather one person.

STUDENT. Wait now, perhaps I know!

JOHANSSON. How can you know?

STUDENT. I'm guessing! Is it . . . a little milkmaid he fears?

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

JOHANSSON. He always turns away whenever he meets a milk-cart . . . And he also talks in his sleep . . . He must have been in Hamburg at one time, I think. . . .

STUDENT. Is the man to be trusted?

JOHANSSON. You may trust him – to do anything!

STUDENT. What is he doing there round the corner now?

JOHANSSON. Listening to the poor . . . sowing a little word, picking out a stone at a time, until the house tumbles down . . . metaphorically speaking . . . You see, I am an educated man, I used to be in a book-shop . . . Are you going now?

STUDENT. I find it hard to be ungrateful . . . Once he saved my father, and now he asks a small service in return . . .

JOHANSSON. What is that?

STUDENT. To go and see 'The Valkyrie' . . .

JOHANSSON. That's beyond me . . . But he is always up to new tricks . . . Look at him now, talking to the policeman . . . He is always thick with the police. He uses them; he snares them in their own interests. He ties their hands with false promises and expectations, while all the time he is pumping them. – You'll see that he is received in the Round Room before the day is over!

STUDENT. What does he want there? What has he to do with the Colonel?

JOHANSSON. I think I can guess, . . . but I'm not sure! But you'll see for yourself, when you get there! . . .

STUDENT. I shall never get there. . . .

JOHANSSON. That depends on yourself! – Go to 'The Valkyrie.' . . .

STUDENT. Is that the way?

THE GHOST SONATA

JOHANSSON. Yes, if *he* has said so. — Look at him there. — Look at him in his war chariot, drawn in triumph by the beggars, who get nothing for their pains, only a hint of a treat at his funeral.

(The OLD MAN appears standing in his wheeled chair drawn by one of the BEGGARS, and followed by the rest.)

OLD MAN. Honour to the noble youth who, at the risk of his own, saved many lives in yesterday's accident! Three cheers for Arkenholtz!

(The BEGGARS bare their heads, but do not cheer. The YOUNG LADY at the window waves her handkerchief. The COLONEL stares out from the window. The FIANCÉE rises at her window. The MAID on the balcony hoists the flag to the top.)

And one cheer more, citizens! It is Sunday, to be sure, but the ass in the pit and the corn in the field will absolve us, and although I am not a Sunday child, I have the gift of prophecy as well as healing, for once I restored a drowned person to life . . . that was in Hamburg on a Sunday morning like this. . . .

(The MILKMAID enters, seen only by the STUDENT and the OLD MAN. She raises her arms like a drowning person, while gazing fixedly at the OLD MAN.)

OLD MAN *(sits down, then collapses, stricken with horror)*. Get me out of this, Johansson! Quick! — Arkenholtz, don't forget 'The Valkyrie'!

STUDENT. What is all this?

JOHANSSON. We'll see! we'll see!

CURTAIN

SCENE II

SCENE: *In the Round Drawing-Room. A stove of white glazed bricks decorated with a mirror and with pendulum clock and candelabras in the background. To the right the entrance lobby, behind which may be seen a green room with mahogany furniture. To the left stands the statue, which is shaded by palms, and can be concealed by curtains. A door to the left in the background leads to the Hyacinth Room where the YOUNG LADY sits reading. One observes the back of the COLONEL in the Green Room, where he sits writing.*

(BENGTTSSON, the valet, enters from the lobby dressed in livery. He is followed by JOHANSSON in evening dress with white tie.)

BENGTTSSON. Johansson, you must wait at table, while I take the coats. Ever done it?

JOHANSSON. I'd have you know, Mr. Bengtsson, that though I push a war chariot in the daytime, I wait in private houses at night, and I have always dreamt of getting into this place . . . queer sort of people? Hm?

BENGTTSSON. Oh, yes, a little out of the ordinary, one might say.

JOHANSSON. Is it a musical party or what?

BENGTTSSON. The usual Ghost supper, as we call it. They drink tea, don't say a single word, or else the Colonel does all the talking. And then they crunch their biscuits, all at the same time, so that it sounds like rats in an attic.

JOHANSSON. Why do you say Ghost supper?

BENGTTSSON. They look like ghosts . . . and they have

THE GHOST SONATA

kept this up for twenty years, always the same people saying the same things, or saying nothing at all for fear of being found out.

JOHANSSON. Is there not a lady in the house too?

BENGTTSSON. Oh yes, but she's a little cracked; she sits in a cupboard, because her eyes cannot bear the light . . . She sits in there . . . (*He points at a papered door in the wall.*)

JOHANSSON. In there?

BENGTTSSON. Well, didn't I say they were a little out of the ordinary . . .

JOHANSSON. What does she look like then?

BENGTTSSON. Like a mummy . . . care to look at her, Mr. Johansson? (*He opens the papered door.*) There she sits!

JOHANSSON. Good Lord!

MUMMY (*babbling*). Why does he open the door, haven't I told him to keep it closed . . .

BENGTTSSON (*in a namby-pamby tone*). Ta, ta, ta, ta. Polly very nice now. Then she'll get something good! - Pretty Polly.

MUMMY (*parrot-like*). Pretty Polly! Are you there, Jacob? CURRRR!

BENGTTSSON. She thinks herself a parrot, and maybe she's right. . . . (*To the MUMMY.*) Whistle for us, Polly!

(*The MUMMY whistles.*)

JOHANSSON. Well, I've seen a few things in my day, but this beats everything!

BENGTTSSON. Don't you see, a house gets old, it becomes mouldy, so when people sit a long time

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

together tormenting each other, they become crazy. This lady here. – Shut up, Polly! That mummy has been sitting here for forty years – same husband, same furniture, same relatives, same friends. . . . (*He closes the paper door.*) And the goings on in this house – well, it's beyond me . . . look at that statue . . . that's the lady as a girl!

JOHANSSON. Good Lord! – is that the mummy?

BENGTTSSON. Yes! – it's enough to make you weep! – But this woman by the power of imagination or somehow has acquired some of the qualities of the talkative bird. – She can't stand cripples or sick people, for instance . . . she can't stand the sight of her own daughter because she is sick. . . .

JOHANSSON. Is the young lady sick?

BENGTTSSON. Didn't you know that, Mr. Johansson?

JOHANSSON. No! . . . And the Colonel, who is he?

BENGTTSSON. Hm, you'll see!

JOHANSSON (*looking at the statue*). It's horrible to think that . . . how old is the lady?

BENGTTSSON. Nobody knows . . . But at thirty-five she is said to have looked like nineteen, and that is what she made the Colonel believe . . . in this house . . . Do you know what that black Japanese screen beside the couch is for? – They call it the death screen, and it is brought out when anyone is going to die, same as in a hospital. . . .

JOHANSSON. What a horrible house . . . And the Student was longing to get in as if it had been paradise . . .

BENGTTSSON. *What Student?* Oh, him! The one who

THE GHOST SONATA

is coming here to-night . . . the Colonel and the young lady happened to meet him at the Opera and both took a fancy to him. . . . Hm! . . . but now it's my turn to ask questions: Who is your master? The Director in the Bath chair . . . ?

JHANSSON. Well! Well! – Is he coming here too?

BENGTTSSON. He's not invited.

JOHANSSON. He comes uninvited! if need be!

★

(The OLD MAN appears in the lobby in frock-coat and top hat and crutches. He steals forward and listens.)

BENGTTSSON. He is a regular old devil, isn't he?

JOHANSSON. Full fledged!

BENGTTSSON. He *looks* like Old Harry!

JOHANSSON. And he's a wizard too! I think – because he passes through locked doors. . . .

OLD MAN (*comes forward and pinches JOHANSSON's ear*). Scoundrel! – take care! (*To BENGTTSSON.*) Tell the Colonel I am here!

BENGTTSSON. Yes, but we are expecting some guests

. . .

OLD MAN. I know! But my visit is as good as expected, though not exactly looked forward to. . . .

BENGTTSSON. I see! What's the name? Director Hummel!

OLD MAN. Exactly. Yes!

(BENGTTSSON crosses the lobby to the Green Room, the door of which he closes behind him.)

(To JOHANSSON) Vanish!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

(JOHANSSON *hesitates.*)

Vanish!

(JOHANSSON *disappears into the lobby.*)

(*The OLD MAN inspects the room and stops in front of the statue in great astonishment.*)

Amelia! . . . It is she! . . . She! (*He strolls about the room fingering objects, arranges his wig in front of the mirror, returns to the statue.*)

MUMMY (*from the cupboard*). Prretty Polly!

OLD MAN (*startled*). What was that? Is there a parrot in the room? But I don't see it!

MUMMY. Are you there, Jacob?

OLD MAN. The house is haunted!

MUMMY. Jacob!

OLD MAN. I'm frightened . . . So that's the kind of secret they have been hiding in this house! (*Looks at a picture with his back turned to the cupboard.*) And that's he . . . he!

(*The MUMMY opens the door, approaches behind the OLD MAN, and snatches his wig.*)

MUMMY. Cuiiii! Is that Jacob! Cuiiii!

OLD MAN (*jumps up*). God in Heaven! Who is it?

MUMMY (*speaking in a natural voice*). Is that you, Jacob?

OLD MAN. My name is Jacob . . .

MUMMY (*moved*). And my name is Amelia!

OLD MAN. No, no, no . . . Oh, my God!

MUMMY. Yes, it is! And once looked like that! (*Pointing*

THE GHOST SONATA

to the statue.) Life's an edifying thing, isn't it? – I live mostly in the cupboard to avoid seeing and being seen. . . . But you, Jacob, what do you seek here?

OLD MAN. My child! Our child . . .

MUMMY. There she sits.

OLD MAN. Where?

MUMMY. There, in the Hyacinth Room!

OLD MAN (*looking at the YOUNG LADY*). Yes, that is she! (*Pause.*) And what does her father say, I mean the Colonel? . . . Your husband?

MUMMY. Once when I was angry with him, I told him everything.

OLD MAN. Well?

MUMMY. He didn't believe me, but answered: 'That's what all wives say when they wish to kill their husbands.' – It was a dreadful crime none the less. His whole life then became a fake, his family tree as well; sometimes I take a look in the peerage, and I say to myself: There she is with her false birth certificate like any servant girl, and the punishment for that is hard labour.

OLD MAN. Well, it's quite common; you gave a false date for your birth I remember. . . .

MUMMY. It was my mother who made me do it . . . I was not to blame! . . . But after all, Jacob, the greater share in our crime was yours. . . .

OLD MAN. No, your husband was the cause of that crime when he took my fiancée from me! – I was born a man who cannot forgive till he has punished. – It was to me an imperative duty . . . and is still!

MUMMY. What do you seek in this house? What do

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

you want? How did you get in? – Does it concern my daughter? If you touch her you shall die!

OLD MAN. I mean well by her!

MUMMY. But you must spare her father!

OLD MAN. No!

MUMMY. Then you shall die; in this room, behind that screen. . . .

OLD MAN. Maybe . . . but I can't let go when I have got my teeth in. . . .

MUMMY. You want to marry her to the student? Why? He is nothing and has nothing.

OLD MAN. He will be rich, thanks to me!

MUMMY. Are you invited here to-night?

OLD MAN. No, but I mean to get an invitation for this Ghost supper!

MUMMY. Do you know who are coming?

OLD MAN. Not exactly.

MUMMY. The Baron . . . who lives above here and whose father-in-law was buried this afternoon. . . .

OLD MAN. The man who is getting a divorce to marry the daughter of the Janitress . . . the man who once was your – lover!

MUMMY. Another guest will be your former fiancée who was seduced by my husband. . . .

OLD MAN. A pretty collection. . . .

MUMMY. Oh God, if we might die! *If* we might die.

OLD MAN. But why do you keep together then?

MUMMY. Crime and guilt bind us together! – We have broken our bonds and gone apart innumerable times, but we are always drawn together again. . . .

THE GHOST SONATA

OLD MAN. And now I think the Colonel is coming.

MUMMY. Then I will go in to Adèle. . . . *(Pause.)*
Consider what you do, Jacob! Spare him. . . .

(Pause, she goes out.)

★

(The COLONEL enters, cold and reserved.)

COLONEL. Be seated, please!

(The OLD MAN sits down deliberately.)

(Pause.)

(Staring fixedly at him.) You wrote this letter, sir?

OLD MAN. Yes!

COLONEL. Your name is Hummel? Eh?

OLD MAN. Yes!

(Pause.)

COLONEL. As I learn that you have bought up all my debts, overdue notes, I conclude that I am in your hands. Now what do you want?

OLD MAN. I want payment, in one way or another.

COLONEL. In what way?

OLD MAN. A very simple one – let us not talk of the money – just put up with me in your house as a guest!

COLONEL. If so little will satisfy you . . .

OLD MAN. Thanks!

COLONEL. Anything more?

OLD MAN. Discharge Bengtsson!

COLONEL. Why should I? My devoted servant, who has been with me a lifetime – and who has the medal for long and faithful service – why should I?

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

OLD MAN. He does possess these excellent qualities, but only in your imagination. — He is not the man he appears to be.

COLONEL. Who is?

OLD MAN. (*Taken aback*). True! But Bengtsson must go!

COLONEL. Do you mean to rule my household?

OLD MAN. Yes! — As everything I see here belongs to me — furniture, curtains, dinner ware, linen . . . and so on!

COLONEL. Anything else?

OLD MAN. Everything! All that is to be seen is mine! I own it!

COLONEL. Granted. It is yours! But my unsullied family honour and my good name belong to myself!

OLD MAN. No, not even that! (*Pause.*) You are not a nobleman!

COLONEL. How dare you!

OLD MAN. (*Takes out a paper*). If you'll read this extract from *The Armorial Gazette*, you will see that the family whose name you are using has been extinct for a century!

COLONEL (*reading*). I have heard rumours to that effect, but the name was my father's before it was mine. . . . (*Reading*). That is true. You are right, you are right. . . . I am not a nobleman! — not even that! — Then I take off my signet ring. — Oh, I remember now . . . it belongs to you! . . . Please!

OLD MAN (*putting the ring into his pocket*). Now let us continue! — You're no Colonel either!

COLONEL. Am I not?

THE GHOST SONATA

OLD MAN. No, you once held a temporary rank of Colonel for a short time in the American Volunteer Force, but after the war in Cuba and the reorganization of the Army, all such titles were abolished. . . .

COLONEL. Is that true?

OLD MAN. (*With a gesture toward his pocket*). Would you like to read?

COLONEL. No, it's unnecessary! . . . Who are you? What right have you to sit there stripping me naked in this fashion?

OLD MAN. You'll see by and by! But as to stripping you naked . . . do you know who you are?

COLONEL. How dare you?

OLD MAN. Take off that wig, and have a look at yourself in the mirror, but take out that set of false teeth at the same time and shave off your moustache, let Bengtsson remove your metal stays, and perhaps a certain X.Y.Z., a lackey, will recognize himself; once a cupboard lover in a certain kitchen . . .

(*The COLONEL makes a movement toward a bell on the table; the OLD MAN forestalls him.*)

Don't touch that bell, and don't call Bengtsson, if you do I'll have him arrested . . . and – now the guests are coming, keep quiet, and we will go on playing our old parts!

COLONEL. Who are you? I recognize the voice and the eyes. . . .

OLD MAN. Don't try to find out, only be silent and obey!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

(The STUDENT enters, and bows to the COLONEL.)

STUDENT. How do you do, sir?

COLONEL. Welcome to my house, young man! Your splendid behaviour in connection with that great disaster has brought your name to everybody's lips, and I count it an honour to receive you in my home. . . .

STUDENT. My humble descent, sir . . . your illustrious name and noble birth . . .

COLONEL. May I introduce Mr. Arkenholtz – Mr. Hummel. . . . The ladies are in there, Mr. Arkenholtz – if you please – I must conclude my conversation with Mr. Hummel. . . .

(The STUDENT is shown into the Hyacinth Room, where he remains visible, standing beside the YOUNG LADY and talking timidly to her.)

A splendid young man, musical, sings, writes poetry . . . if he were only a nobleman, if he belonged to our class I don't think I should object. . . . Well . . .

OLD MAN. To what?

COLONEL. Oh, my daughter . . .

OLD MAN. *Your* daughter? – But apropos of that why is she always sitting in there?

COLONEL. She has to spend all her time in the Hyacinth Room when she is not out! That is a peculiarity of hers . . . Ah . . . here comes Miss Betty von Holsteinkrona, a charming creature . . . a secular Canoness, with a pension just enough to suit her birth and position. . . .

OLD MAN *(to himself)*. My fiancée!

*

THE GHOST SONATA

(*The FIANCÉE enters, white-haired and odd-looking.*)

COLONEL. Miss von Holsteinkrona – Mr. Hummel.

(*The FIANCÉE curtsies and takes a seat.*)

★

(*The NOBLEMAN in mourning enters and seats himself. He looks mysterious.*)

Baron Skanskorg. . . .

OLD MAN (*aside without rising*). That's the jewellery thief, I think. . . . (*To the COLONEL.*) Bring in the Mummy, and our gathering will be complete. . . .

COLONEL (*in the door of the Hyacinth Room*). Polly!

★

(*MUMMY enters.*)

MUMMY. Currrrr!

COLONEL. Should the young people come in too?

OLD MAN. No, not the young people! They must be spared. . . .

(*All are seated in a circle, silent.*)

COLONEL. Shall we order the tea now?

OLD MAN. What's the use! No one cares for tea, why should we sit here and be hypocrites.

(*Pause.*)

COLONEL. Shall we sit and talk then?

OLD MAN (*speaking slowly and with pauses*). Talk of the weather which we know all about; ask one another's state of health, which we know just as well; I prefer silence, then thoughts become audible and we can see

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

the past; silence can hide nothing . . . but words can. I read the other day that the difference of languages had its origin in the desire amongst savage peoples to keep their tribal secrets hidden from outsiders. Thus every language is a code, and he who finds the key can understand every language in the world, which does not prevent secrets from leaking out without a key, and especially when paternity has to be proved, but, of course, legal proof is another matter. Two false witnesses suffice to prove anything on which they agree, but you don't bring witnesses in the adventure which I have in mind. Nature herself has planted in man a sense of modesty, which tends to hide what should be hidden. But we slip into situations unawares, and sometimes by a chance the greatest secret is unveiled, the mask is torn from the impostor, the villain is exposed. . . .

(Pause, all look at each other in silence.)

How silent you have become!

(Long silence.)

Here, for instance, in this respectable house, in this attractive home, where beauty and culture and wealth join hands . . .

(Long silence.)

All of us who sit here, we know who we are . . . don't we? I need not say that. . . . And you know me, although you pretend ignorance. . . . There again sits my daughter, *mine*, that you know too. . . . She has lost the desire to live without knowing why . . . is

THE GHOST SONATA

withering away in this air charged with crime and deceit and falsehood of every kind . . . that is why I brought her a friend in whose company she may enjoy the light and heat that is given out by noble deeds. . . .

(Long silence.)

That was my mission in this house, to pull out the weeds, to expose the crimes, to settle all accounts, so that these young people can start afresh in this home which I give to them!

(Long silence.)

Now I grant you all a safe-conduct. Everybody may leave in his proper turn: Whoever stays will be arrested!

(Long silence.)

Do you hear the ticking of the clock like a deathwatch in the wall! Can you hear what it says? 'It's time! It's time! It's time!' – When it strikes shortly, your time will be up, and then you can go, but not before. You may notice, that the clock shakes its fist at you before it strikes. – Listen! There it is! 'Better beware,' it says. – And I can strike, too . . . *(He strikes the table with one of his crutches.)* Do you hear?

(Silence.)

MUMMY *(goes up to the clock and stops it; then in a clear and serious voice)*. But I can stop the course of time. – I can wipe out the past and undo what is done. Not with bribes, nor with threats – but with suffering and repentance. *(Turns to the OLD MAN.)* We are miserable

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

human beings, that we know. We have failed and we have sinned, we like the rest. We are not what we seem, but in our souls we are better than we seem, because we hate our sins. But when you, Jacob Hummel, with a false name, sit there in judgment on us, you prove yourself worse than us, miserable sinners though we be. Even you are not what you seem – you are a thief of human souls. For you stole me once upon a time by false promises. You killed the Consul, whom they buried this afternoon, strangling him with debts. You have now stolen the Student, binding him with an imaginary claim against his father, who never owed you a halfpenny. . . .

(The OLD MAN, after trying to rise and say something, sinks back into his chair. He is seen to shrink more and more during the following.)

But there is one dark spot in your life which I do not quite know and yet suspect . . . I believe Bengtsson knows about it! *(She rings the bell on the table.)*

OLD MAN. No! not Bengtsson, not him!

MUMMY. So he does know! *(She rings again.)*

(The little MILKMAID now appears in the door of the lobby, unseen by all except the OLD MAN, who shrinks back in horror. The MILKMAID vanishes when BENGTSSON enters.)

Do you know this man, Bengtsson?

BENGTSSON. Oh, yes, I know him, and he me. Life has its ups and downs, as you know. I have been in his service, another time he has been in mine. He was

THE GHOST SONATA

a cupboard lover in my kitchen, fed by my cook for two whole years – because he had to be away at three o'clock the dinner was made ready at two, and the house had to eat the leavings of that brute – and he also drank the soup stock, and we had to fill it up with water – he sat out there like a vampire, and sucked the juice out of the house, so that we became like skeletons – and he nearly got us into jail when we called the cook a thief.

Later I met this man in Hamburg under another name, he was a moneylender then, a bloodsucker. But while there, he was accused of having lured a young girl out on to the ice, to drown her, because she had seen him commit a crime, and he was afraid of being exposed. . . .

MUMMY (*making a pass with her hand over the face of the OLD MAN*). That is you! And now, give up the notes and the will!

(JOHANSSON *appears in the lobby door and watches the scene with great interest, as his slavery has now come to an end. The OLD MAN produces a bundle of papers and throws it on the table.*)

(*Stroking the OLD MAN's back.*) Eh, Jacob. Is Jacob there?

OLD MAN (*like a parrot*). Jacob is there! Pretty Polly! Cuiiii!

MUMMY. May the clock strike?

OLD MAN (*clucks*). The clock may strike! (*Imitating a cuckoo clock.*) Cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo . . . cuckoo . . .

MUMMY (*opening the cupboard door*). Now the clock has

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

struck! – Rise, and enter the cupboard, where I have spent twenty years repenting our crime. – There hangs a rope which may stand for the one with which you strangled the Consul up there, and with which you meant to strangle your benefactor . . . Go!

(The OLD MAN enters the cupboard.)

(She closes the door.) Bengtsson! put up the screen! the Death Screen!

(BENGTSSON places the screen in front of the door.)

It is finished! – God have mercy on his soul!

ALL. Amen!

(Long silence.)

*

(The YOUNG LADY appears in the Hyacinth Room with a harp on which she accompanies the STUDENT'S recitation.)

Song with prelude.

I saw the Sun; then lo! methought
Mine eyes beheld the Hidden Power.
All men's actions have their guerdon,
Blest is he who doeth good.
No deed that we have wrought in anger
Can find in evil its atonement.
Comfort him whom thou hast grieved,
With goodness: this alone availeth.
He feareth not who doeth no evil:
Good is to be innocent.

CURTAIN

SCENE III

*A room in rather bizarre style with Oriental motives. Hyacinths of all colours everywhere. On the tiled stove a huge, seated Buddha, in whose lap rests a bulb from which the stalk of a shallot (*Allium ascalonicum*) rises, spreading its almost globular cluster of white, starlike flowers.*

(An open door in the right background leads into the Round Drawing-Room where the COLONEL and the MUMMY are seated idle and silent. A part of the Death Screen is also visible. Another door to the left leads to the pantry and the kitchen. The STUDENT, the YOUNG LADY (Adèle) at the table. She at her harp, he standing.)

YOUNG LADY. Now sing to my flowers!

STUDENT. Is this the flower of your soul?

YOUNG LADY. The one and only! Do you love the hyacinth?

STUDENT. I love it above all other flowers. Its virginal shape rises slender and straight out of the bulb which rests on the water and sends its pure white rootlets down into the colourless fluid. I love the colours of it, the snow-white innocent pure one, the honey-yellow sweet one, the youthful pink, the ripe red, but above all the blue, the blue of the dewdrop, deep-eyed, full of faith . . . I love them all, more than gold and pearls, have loved them since I was a child, have admired them, because they possess every fine quality that I lack . . . yet! . . .

YOUNG LADY. What?

STUDENT. My love is not returned, for these beautiful blossoms hate me. . . .

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

YOUNG LADY. How?

STUDENT. Their fragrance, pure and powerful as the early winds of spring which have passed over melting snows, confuses my senses, deafens me, blinds me, crowds me out of the room, bombards me with poisoned arrows that put woe in my heart and fever in my head! Do you not know the legend of that flower?

YOUNG LADY. Tell me!

STUDENT. But first to solve its riddle. The bulb is the earth, resting on the water or buried in the soil. Now the stalk rises, straight as the axis of the world and at its top are the six-pointed star flowers.

YOUNG LADY. Above the earth – the stars! Oh! that is a great thought, where did you get it? How did you discover it?

STUDENT. Let me see! – In your eyes! – Why it is an image of the Cosmos . . . And that is why Buddha sits holding the earth-bulb, with brooding eyes watching to see it grow outwards and upwards, transforming itself into a heaven – the poor earth will be a heaven! That is what the Buddha waits for!

YOUNG LADY. I see now – is not the snowflake six-pointed too, like the hyacinth lily?

STUDENT. You are right! – Thus the snowflakes are falling stars . . .

YOUNG LADY. And the snowdrop is a snow star . . . grown out of the snow.

STUDENT. But Sirius, the largest and most beautiful of all the red and yellow stars in the firmament, is the Narcissus, with its yellow and red chalice and its six white rays. . . .

THE GHOST SONATA

YOUNG LADY. Have you seen the shallot blossom?

STUDENT. Indeed, I have! — It carries its flowers within a ball, a globe resembling the celestial one, and strewn with white stars. . . .

YOUNG LADY. How glorious! Whose thought was that?

STUDENT. Yours!

YOUNG LADY. Yours!

STUDENT. Ours! — We two have given birth to something; we are wedded. . . .

YOUNG LADY. Not yet. . . .

STUDENT. What remains?

YOUNG LADY. Waiting, trials, patience!

STUDENT. Well, try me! (*Pause.*) Tell me! Why do your parents sit in there so quietly, not saying a single word?

YOUNG LADY. Because they have nothing to say to each other, and because neither believes what the other says. My father puts it like this: What is the use of talking, when you can't impose upon each other?

STUDENT. That's horrible. . . .

YOUNG LADY. Here comes the Cook! . . . look at her, how big and fat she is. . . .

STUDENT. What does she want?

YOUNG LADY. She will ask me about the dinner; you see, I am looking after the house during my mother's illness. . . .

STUDENT. Have we to bother about the kitchen?

YOUNG LADY. We must eat . . . look at the Cook, I can't bear the sight of her. . . .

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

STUDENT. What kind of a monster is she?

YOUNG LADY. She belongs to the Hummel family of vampires. She is eating us. . . .

STUDENT. Why not discharge her?

YOUNG LADY. She won't go! We can do nothing with her, and we've got her because of our sins . . . don't you see that we are pining and wasting away? . . .

STUDENT. Don't you get food then?

YOUNG LADY. Yes, many dishes, but all the nourishment is gone. . . . She boils the life out of the beef, gives us the fibre and water, while she drinks the stock herself. And when there's a roast, she first boils out the sap, eats the gravy and drinks the juice. Everything she touches loses its savour. It is as if she sucked with her eyes. We get the grounds when she has had the coffee. She drinks the wine and fills the bottle up with water. . . .

STUDENT. Kick her out!

YOUNG LADY. We can't!

STUDENT. Why?

YOUNG LADY. We don't know! She won't leave! And no one can make her — she has taken all our strength from us.

STUDENT. Will you let me dispose of her?

YOUNG LADY. No! It has to be as it is, I suppose! — Here she is! She will ask me what there is to be for dinner; I say so-and-so, she objects and gets her own way.

STUDENT. Let her decide for herself then!

YOUNG LADY. She won't decide.

STUDENT. What a strange house; it is bewitched!

THE GHOST SONATA

YOUNG LADY. Yes! – but now she turns back, seeing you here!

*

COOK (*in the doorway*). No, that's not the reason! (*She grins so that her teeth show.*)

STUDENT. Out you get!

COOK. When it pleases me! (*Pause.*) Now it does please me!

(*She disappears.*)

YOUNG LADY. Don't lose your temper! – Practise patience; she is part of the ordeal we face in this house! But we have a housemaid too, and we have to do the rooms again after her!

STUDENT. Now I am done! Cor in æthere! Music!

YOUNG LADY. Wait!

STUDENT. Music!

YOUNG LADY. Patience! – This room is named the Room of Ordeal. – It is beautiful to look at, but is only full of imperfections. . . .

STUDENT. Incredible! Yet such things have to be borne! It is very beautiful, although a little cold. Why don't you have a fire?

YOUNG LADY. Because the chimney smokes.

STUDENT. Can't you sweep the chimney?

YOUNG LADY. It doesn't help! . . . Do you see that writing-desk?

STUDENT. Remarkably handsome!

YOUNG LADY. But one leg is too short; every day I put a piece of cork under that leg; every day the house-

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

maid takes it away when she sweeps the room; every day I have to cut a new piece. The penholder and writing materials too are spotted with ink every morning, and I have to clean them after that woman, as sure as the sun rises. (*Pause.*) What is the worst thing you can think of?

STUDENT. To count the washing! Ugh!

YOUNG LADY. That's what I have to do! Ugh!

STUDENT. Anything else?

YOUNG LADY. To be waked out of your sleep and have to get up and rehook the window . . . which the housemaid has left unlatched.

STUDENT. Anything else!

YOUNG LADY. To get up on a ladder and tie on the cord which the housemaid has torn from the window blind.

STUDENT. Anything else!

YOUNG LADY. To sweep after her; to dust after her; to start the fire again, after she has merely thrown some wood into the stove! To watch the damper in the stove; to wipe every glass; to lay the table over again; to open the wine bottles; to see that the rooms are aired; to remake my bed; to rinse the water-bottle that is green with sediment; to buy matches and soap, which are always lacking; to wipe the chimneys and cut the wicks to keep the lamps from smoking . . . and to keep them from going out when we have company, I have to fill them myself. . . .

STUDENT. Music!

YOUNG LADY. Wait! — The labour comes first, the labour of keeping ~~the~~ the dirt of life at a distance!

THE GHOST SONATA

STUDENT. But aren't you wealthy? Why not have two servants!

YOUNG LADY. That wouldn't help! Even if there were three! It is troublesome to live, and at times I get tired . . . think then if there were a nursery as well!

STUDENT. The greatest of joys . . .

YOUNG LADY. And the most expensive. . . . Is life worth so much trouble?

STUDENT. I suppose it depends on the reward you expect for your labours . . . to win your hand I would shrink from nothing.

YOUNG LADY. Don't say that! – You can never get me!

STUDENT. Why?

YOUNG LADY. You mustn't ask. (*Pause.*)

STUDENT. You dropped your bracelet out of the window . . .

YOUNG LADY. Because my hand had grown so small. . . .

(*Pause.*)

(*The COOK appears with a Japanese bottle in her hand.*)

There is the one who eats me and all of us alive.

STUDENT. What has she in her hand?

COOK. This is the colouring bottle with letters like scorpions on it. It's the soy that turns water into bouillon, and that takes the place of gravy. You can make cabbage soup out of it, you can make mock turtle soup out of it.

STUDENT. Get out!

COOK. You take the sap out of us, and we out of you; we keep the blood and give you back the water – with

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

the colouring. It is colour that counts! – Now I am going, but I'll stay just the same, as long as I please!

(She goes out.)

STUDENT. Why has Bengtsson got a medal?

YOUNG LADY. For his great merits.

STUDENT. Has he no faults?

YOUNG LADY. Yes, great ones, but faults bring you no medals.

(Both smile.)

STUDENT. You have many secrets in this house

YOUNG LADY. As in all houses . . . permit us to keep ours! *(Pause.)*

STUDENT. Do you care for frankness?

YOUNG LADY. Within reason!

STUDENT. At times I am overwhelmed with a craving to say all I think; yet I know the world would go to pieces if one were perfectly frank. *(Pause.)* I attended a funeral the other day . . . in the church – it was very solemn and beautiful!

YOUNG LADY. That of Mr. Hummel?

STUDENT. Yes, that of my pretended benefactor! – An elderly friend of the deceased acted as mace bearer and stood at the head of the coffin. I was particularly impressed by the dignified manner and moving words of the clergyman – I cried and we all cried. – Afterwards we went to a restaurant and there I learned that the man with the mace had been too friendly with the dead man's son . . .

(The YOUNG LADY stares at him, trying to make out his meaning.)

THE GHOST SONATA

I learned too, that the dead man had borrowed money from his son's devoted friend . . . (*Pause.*) Next day the clergyman was arrested for embezzling the church funds! – Nice, isn't it!

YOUNG LADY. Oh! (*Pause.*)

STUDENT. Do you know what I am thinking about you now?

YOUNG LADY. Don't tell me, or I'll die!

STUDENT. I must, otherwise I shall die! . . .

YOUNG LADY. It is only in a madhouse you say all that you think. . . .

STUDENT. Exactly! My father finished up in a madhouse. . . .

YOUNG LADY. Was he sick?

STUDENT. No, he was well, but he was mad! You see, it broke out once, and these are the circumstances . . . Like all of us, he had his circle of acquaintances, he called them friends for short. They were a lot of scoundrels, of course, as people mostly are; he had to have some society, however, as he couldn't be all alone. As you know, no one tells people what he thinks of them, in everyday life, and he didn't either. Of course he knew how false they were, he sounded the depths of their perfidy, but he was a wise man and well brought up, and so he always remained polite. One day, however, he gave a big party – it was in the evening and he was tired out by a hard's day's work and the double strain of keeping silent and talking rot to his guests . . .

(*The YOUNG LADY is horrified.*)

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

Well, at the dinner table he rapped for silence, raised his glass to begin to speak . . . then something loosened the trigger, and in a long speech he stripped the whole company naked, one by one, told them all their treacheries and tired out sat down in the middle of the table and shouted at them 'Go to Hell!'

YOUNG LADY. Oh!

STUDENT. I was present, and I shall never forget what happened after that! . . . Father and mother came to blows, the guests rushed to the doors . . . and my father was taken to a madhouse, where he died! (*Pause.*) By keeping still too long water stagnates and rots, and so it is in this house too, for there is something very rotten here. And yet I thought it paradise itself when I saw you enter the first time . . . it was a Sunday morning, and I stood gazing into these rooms. I saw a Colonel who was no Colonel. I had a generous benefactor who was a thief and had to hang himself. I saw a mummy who was not a mummy, and a virgin – how about the virginity by the by? . . . Where is beauty to be found? In nature, and in my mind when it is in its Sunday clothes. Where, honour and faith! In fairy tales and children's plays. Where can I find anything that fulfils its promise? . . . In my imagination! – Now your flowers have poisoned me, and I have given the poison back to you – I asked you to become my wife in a home full of poetry, and song and music; and then the Cook appeared . . . Sursum corda! Try once more to strike fire and purple out of the golden harp . . . try, I ask you, I implore you on my knees. . . . Well, then I'll do it myself! (*He*

THE GHOST SONATA

picks up the harp, but the strings give no sound.) It is dumb and deaf! To think that the most beautiful flowers are so poisonous, are the most poisonous. A curse lies on the whole creation and on life. . . . Why would you not be my bride? Because the well-spring of life in you is sick . . . now I feel the vampire in the kitchen begins to suck my life. She must be a Lamia, one of those that suck the blood of children. It is always in the servants' quarters that the seed-leaves of the children are nipped, if that has not already happened in the bedroom . . . there are poisons that destroy the sight, and poisons that open the eyes. – I seem to have been born with the last, for I cannot see the ugly as the beautiful, or call evil good – I cannot! Jesus Christ descended into hell. That meant His pilgrimage on earth, to this madhouse, this jail, this morgue – this earth. And the madmen killed him when he wished to liberate them, but the robber was set free. The robber always gets sympathy! Woe, woe! to all of us! Saviour of the world, save us, we perish!

(The YOUNG LADY has collapsed. She seems to be dying. She manages to ring a bell. BENGTTSSON enters.)

YOUNGLADY. Bring the screen! Quick! – I am dying!

(BENGTTSSON comes back with the screen, opens it and places it in front of the YOUNG LADY.)

STUDENT. The liberator is coming! Welcome, thou pale and gentle one! – Sleep beauteous, unhappy innocent creature, whose sufferings are undeserved. Sleep without dreaming, and when you wake again . . .

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

may you be greeted by a sun that does not burn, in a home with no dust, by friends without stain, by a love without flaw! . . . Thou wise and gentle Buddha, who sittest waiting there to see a Heaven sprout from the earth, endow us with patience in the hour of trial, and with purity of will, so that our hope be not cherished in vain!

(The strings of the harp hum softly, and a white light floods the room.)

I saw the Sun; then lo! methought
Mine eyes beheld the Hidden Power.
All men's actions have their guerdon,
Blest is he who doeth good.
No deed that we have wrought in anger
Can find in evil its atonement.
Comfort him whom thou hast grieved,
With goodness: this alone availeth.
He feareth not who doeth no evil:
Good is to be innocent.

(A faint moaning sound is heard from behind the screen.)

STUDENT. You poor little child, you child of this world of illusion, guilt, suffering, and death; this world of eternal change, disappointment and pain! May the Lord of Heaven have mercy on you in your journey.

(The whole room disappears, and in its place appears 'The Island of the Dead' by Böecklin as background. Soft music, very quiet and pleasantly sad, is heard from the distant island.)

CURTAIN

A DREAM PLAY

★

Written 1902

Translated by

G. D. LOCOCK

AUTHOR'S NOTE

IN this Dream Play, as in his earlier one 'To Damascus,' the Author has tried to imitate the disjointed but apparently logical form of a dream. Anything may happen: everything is possible and probable. Time and space do not exist; on an insignificant groundwork of reality imagination spins and weaves new patterns: a mixture of memories, experiences, unfettered fancies, absurdities and improvisations.

The characters are split, doubled and multiplied: they evaporate and are condensed, are diffused and concentrated. But a single consciousness holds sway over them all – that of the dreamer; for him there are no secrets, no inconsequences, no scruples and no law. The dreamer neither condemns nor acquits: he merely relates; and since a dream is usually painful, less frequently cheerful, a tone of melancholy, of sympathy with all that lives, runs through the swaying narrative. Sleep, the liberator, often plays a painful part, but when the pain is at its fiercest comes the awakening to reconcile the sufferer with reality, which, however agonizing it be, is at that moment a joy compared with the excruciating dream.

PROLOGUE

The background represents cloud-domes resembling demolished slate-cliffs, with ruins of castles and fortresses.

The constellations Leo, Virgo and Libra are visible, and shining brightly among them is the planet Jupiter.

(INDRA'S DAUGHTER is standing on the topmost cloud.)

INDRA'S VOICE (*from above*). Where art thou, Daughter, where?

INDRA'S DAUGHTER. Here, Father, here!

VOICE. Thou'rt gone astray, my child; give heed, thou sinkest . . .

How cam'st thou hither?

DAUGHTER. From the high Ether on the lightning's track I came,

A storm-cloud for my chariot . . .

But the cloud sank, and now my course is downward . . .

Tell me, O mighty Father, Indra, to what regions

I now am come? so close the air,

So hard to breathe!

VOICE. Leaving the second sphere thou camest to the third.

From Çucra, Star of Morning,

Far art thou come, and enterest now

Earth's atmosphere; there take thou note

Of the Sun's Seventh House – 'tis called the Scales –

Where the Day's Star presides at Autumn's weighing,

And day and night are equal . . .

DAUGHTER. Thou speakest of the Earth – is it that dark

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

That ponderous world that's lighted by the moon?

VOICE. Of all the globes through space that wander
It is the heaviest and densest.

DAUGHTER. And doth the Sun shine never there?

VOICE. Yea, the Sun shines thereon, but not unceasing . . .

DAUGHTER. A rift is in the cloud. I see down there. . .

VOICE. What see'st thou, child?

DAUGHTER. I see . . . that Earth is fair . . . I see
green forests,

Blue waters and white peaks and yellow fields . . .

VOICE. Yes, it is fair, as all that Brahma made . . .
Yet fairer still it was in the first dawn

Of Time; then something happened – maybe some
Displacement of the orbit, some revolt

Followed by crime, which could not pass unchecked . . .

DAUGHTER. *Now I hear sounds arising thence . . .*
What folk are they that have their dwelling there?

VOICE. Descend and see . . . Of Brahma's children I
would speak

No ill, but what thou hearest is their language.

DAUGHTER. It sounds like . . . nay, it hath no cheerful ring.

VOICE. So I could well believe! their mother-tongue
Is called Complaint. Truly a discontented,
A thankless generation is this earthly . . .

DAUGHTER. Nay, say not so! for now comes shouts of joy,
And shots and din, and lightning flashes,
And bells are ringing, fires are kindled;
And hark! a thousand thousand voices
Singing their praise and thanks to heaven . . .

A DREAM PLAY

(*A pause.*)

Thou art too hard on them, my Father . . .

VOICE. Descend and see, and hear; then come again
And tell me if this voice of their complaint
And lamentation has just cause . . .

DAUGHTER. So be it: I descend! but come with me!

VOICE. Nay, for I cannot breathe their air . . .

DAUGHTER. Now sinks the cloud: 'tis stifling, I feel
choked . . .

It is not air, 'tis smoke and water that I breathe . . .

So dense, it drags me downward, downward:
Even now I can discern its lurching:

Surely this third of spheres is not the highest . . .

VOICE. The highest, nay! yet is it not the lowest;
Dust is it called, goes whirling round like all the others,
Whence dizziness at times infects its people,
Hovering 'twixt folly and the bounds of madness. —
Courage, my Daughter! this is but a trial.

DAUGHTER (*on her knees, while the cloud descends*). I sink!

The background represents a forest of gigantic hollyhocks in flower: white, pink, purple, sulphur-yellow, and violet. Above them is seen the gilded roof of a castle, with a crown-shaped flower-bud at the top. Under the walls of the castle heaps of straw are seen lying about, covering disused stable litter which has been cleared out. The wings, which remain unaltered throughout the play, consist of conventional frescoes, which represent at the same time interiors, architecture and landscape.

(Enter the GLAZIER and the DAUGHTER.)

DAUGHTER. The castle keeps on growing out of the earth. . . . Do you see how much it's grown since last year?

GLAZIER (*aside*). I've never seen that castle before . . . never heard of a castle growing . . . still - (*To the DAUGHTER, with conviction.*) Yes, it's grown six feet, but that's because they've manured it . . . and if you look carefully you'll see a wing has come out on the sunny side.

DAUGHTER. Oughtn't it to be flowering soon? It's past midsummer.

GLAZIER. Don't you see the flower up at the top there?

DAUGHTER. Yes, I see! (*Claps her hands.*) Tell me, Father: why do flowers grow out of dirt?

GLAZIER (*innocently*). They don't feel at home in the dirt, so they hurry up into the light as quickly as they can, to bloom and die!

DAUGHTER. Do you know who lives in that castle?

GLAZIER. I used to know, but I don't remember.

A DREAM PLAY

DAUGHTER. I believe there's a prisoner there . . . and I'm sure he's waiting for me to set him free.

GLAZIER. But at what cost?

DAUGHTER. One doesn't bargain about what one *has* to do. Let's go into the castle! . . .

GLAZIER. Yes, let's go!

★

(They go towards the background, which is slowly drawn away towards the sides. The scene is now a simple bare room with a table and some chairs. On one of the chairs is sitting an OFFICER, in a very unusual modern uniform. He is rocking the chair, and striking the table with his sword.)

DAUGHTER *(goes up to the OFFICER and takes the sword gently out of his hand)*. Don't do that! don't do that!

OFFICER. Agnes dear, let me keep my sword!

DAUGHTER. No, you're cutting the table to pieces! *(To her father.)* Go down to the harness-room and put the pane in. We shall meet later! *(The GLAZIER goes out.)*

★

DAUGHTER. You're a prisoner in your own rooms; I've come to set you free!

OFFICER. Well, I've been waiting for that, but I wasn't sure you'd be willing.

DAUGHTER. The castle is strong: it has seven walls, but – it shall be done! . . . Do you wish it, or do you not?

OFFICER. To tell the truth – I don't know! I come off badly either way! Every joy in life must be paid for with twice its equivalent in sorrow. It's hard enough

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

where I am; but if I buy the sweets of freedom I shall have to suffer threefold. — Agnes, I'd rather go through with it, if only I'm allowed to see you!

DAUGHTER. What do you see in me?

OFFICER. The beautiful, which is the harmony of the universe. — There are lines in your form which I find only in the orbits of the solar system, in the beautiful resonance of strings, in the vibrations of light. — You are a child of heaven . . .

DAUGHTER. You are that too!

OFFICER. Then why do I have to look after horses, mind stables and see to the straw being removed?

DAUGHTER. So that you may long to get away from it all!

OFFICER. I do — but it's such a trouble to get free of it!

DAUGHTER. But it is a duty to seek freedom in the light!

OFFICER. A duty? Life has never recognized any duties towards me!

DAUGHTER. You feel you've been wronged by life?

OFFICER. Yes! it hasn't been fair . . .

★

(Voices are now heard from behind a screen, which is immediately pulled away. The OFFICER and the DAUGHTER look in that direction and become motionless in gesture and expression.)

At a table is sitting the MOTHER, an invalid. Before her is burning a tallow candle, which she trims from time to time with candle-snuffers. On the table are lying heaps of shirts which she has just sewn, and which she is

A DREAM PLAY

marking with marking-ink and a quill pen. On the left is a brown wardrobe.)

FATHER (*gently, offering her a silk shawl*). Won't you have it?

MOTHER. A silk shawl for me, dear – what good'll that be when I'm going to die so soon?

FATHER. You believe what the Doctor says?

MOTHER. Yes, I believe him too; but most of all I believe in the voice which speaks here.

FATHER (*sadly*). It's really true then? . . . And your first and your last thoughts are for your children!

MOTHER. They were my life: my justification . . . my joy, and my sorrow. . .

FATHER. Kristin, forgive me . . . everything!

MOTHER. But what is there to forgive? Forgive *me*, dear! We have plagued each other – why? We don't know! We couldn't help it! . . . However, here's the children's new linen . . . See that they change twice a week, on Sundays and Wednesdays, and that Louisa washes them . . . all over . . . Are you going out?

FATHER. I have to be up at the masters' meeting – by eleven!

MOTHER. Ask Alfred to come in before you go!

FATHER (*pointing to the OFFICER*). Why, here he is, all the time!

MOTHER. Surely my sight 's going too! . . . yes, it's getting dark . . . (*Snuffs the candle.*) Alfred! come here!

★

(*The FATHER goes out through the middle of the wall, nodding good-bye.*)

★

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

(*The OFFICER goes up to the MOTHER.*)

MOTHER. Who's that girl?

OFFICER (*whispers*). It's Agnes!

MOTHER. Oh, is that Agnes? Do you know what they say? . . . that she's the God Indra's daughter, who asked to be allowed to come down to earth so as to find out how it really is with human beings. . . . But don't say anything! . . .

OFFICER. A child of the gods!

MOTHER (*raising her voice*). Alfred dear, I shall soon be leaving you and your brothers and sisters. . . . Let me tell you one thing – to remember all your life!

OFFICER (*sadly*). Tell me, Mother!

MOTHER. Just one word: never quarrel with God!

OFFICER. What do you mean, Mother?

MOTHER. You mustn't go about feeling you've been wronged by life.

OFFICER. But if people treat me unjustly. . . .

MOTHER. You're thinking of the time when you were unjustly punished for taking a penny which was afterwards found!

OFFICER. Yes! and that act of injustice gave a warped direction to the whole of my after-life. . . .

MOTHER. Very well! But now go to that wardrobe there. . . .

OFFICER (*ashamed*). So you know about that! It's . . .

MOTHER. 'The Swiss Family Robinson' . . . which . . .

OFFICER. Don't say any more! . . .

MOTHER. Which your brother was punished for . . . and which *you* tore to pieces and hid!

OFFICER. Fancy that wardrobe still standing there

A DREAM PLAY

after twenty years! . . . Think how often we've moved: and my mother died ten years ago!

MOTHER. And what of it? You keep on asking about everything, and so spoil the best part of your life! . . . Ah, here's Lina!

★

LINA (*coming in*). Thanks very much, ma'am, but I can't go to the christening. . . .

MOTHER. Why not, child?

LINA. I've got nothing to wear!

MOTHER. You can borrow this shawl of mine!

LINA. Oh, ma'am! but that would never do!

MOTHER. I don't see why! I'm not likely to go to any more parties. . . .

★

OFFICER. What will father say? Why, it's a present from him. . . .

MOTHER. What small minds. . . .

★

FATHER (*putting his head in*). Are you going to lend the girl my present?

MOTHER. Don't say that . . . remember, I've been a servant-girl myself. . . . Why should you hurt an innocent girl?

FATHER. Why should you hurt me, your husband. . . .

MOTHER. Oh, this life! If one does anything nice there's always somebody who thinks it nasty . . . doing good to one person means doing harm to another. Oh, this life! (*She snuffs the candle so that it goes out. The stage becomes dark and the screen is drawn forward again.*)

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

DAUGHTER. Men are pitiable creatures!

OFFICER. You find that!

DAUGHTER. Yes, life is hard, but love overcomes all!
come and see!

(They go towards the background.)

*

(The background is drawn up and a new one appears, representing a shabby old party-wall. In the middle of the wall is a gate opening on to a passage which leads to a green open space, where one sees an enormous blue monkshood (aconite). To the left of the gate sits the PORTRESS, with a shawl over her head and shoulders, crocheting a star-pattern coverlet. On the right is a notice-board which the BILLSTICKER is washing; near him is a dip-net with a green handle. Further to the right is a door with an air-hole shaped like a four-leaved clover. To the left of the gate stands a small linden-tree with coal-black stem and a few pale-green leaves. Close to that is a cellar window.)

DAUGHTER *(going up to the PORTRESS)*. Isn't the star-coverlet finished yet?

PORTRESS. No, dear; twenty-six years is nothing for such a piece of work!

DAUGHTER. And your lover never came back?

PORTRESS. No, but it wasn't his fault. He *had* to go away . . . poor boy; that was thirty years ago!

DAUGHTER *(to BILLSTICKER)*. She was in the ballet, wasn't she? Up there in the opera-house?

BILLSTICKER. She was number one there . . . but when *he* left it seemed as if he took her dancing away with him like . . . and so she never got any more parts. . . .

A DREAM PLAY

DAUGHTER. They all complain, with their eyes at any rate, and with their voices. . . .

BILLSTICKER. I don't grumble so much now . . . not now I've got my dip-net and my green fish-box!

DAUGHTER. And that makes you happy?

BILLSTICKER. Happy? – why 'twas the dream of my youth . . . and now it's come true! I'm fifty now, you see. . . .

DAUGHTER. Fifty years for a dip-net and a box. . . .

BILLSTICKER. A *green* box, a *green* . . .

DAUGHTER (*to the PORTRESS*). Give me the shawl now: then I can sit here and look on the children of men! You stand behind and tell me about them! (*Puts on the shawl and sits down by the gate.*)

PORTRESS. To-day's the last day before the opera season ends . . . now's the time they find out if they're engaged. . . .

DAUGHTER. And those that aren't?

PORTRESS. O Lord, what a sight! I pull the shawl over my head, I . . .

DAUGHTER. Poor creatures!

PORTRESS. Look, here's one coming! . . . She's not got an engagement . . . See how she's crying. . . .

*

(The SINGER comes rushing out through the gate from the right, with her handkerchief to her eyes. She pauses for a moment in the passage beyond the gate and leans her head against the wall. Then goes out quickly.)

DAUGHTER. Men are pitiable creatures!

*

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

PORTRESS. But look there! that's more like a happy one!

*

(*The OFFICER comes in through the passage: in frock-coat and tall hat, with a bunch of roses in his hand. Looks radiantly happy.*)

PORTRESS. He's going to marry Madam Victoria! . . .

OFFICER (*down stage: looks up and sings*). Victoria!

PORTRESS. Madam will be here in a minute!

OFFICER. Good! the carriage is waiting, the table is laid and the champagne is on ice. . . . Let me embrace you, ladies! (*Embraces the DAUGHTER and the PORTRESS. Sings.*) Victoria!

A WOMAN'S VOICE (*from above, sings*). I am here!

OFFICER (*beginning to walk about*). All right! I'm waiting!

*

DAUGHTER. Do you know me?

OFFICER. No, I know only one woman . . . Victoria! Seven years have I come here to wait for her . . . at noon, when the sun touched the chimneys, and in the evening, when the shadows of night began to fall. . . . Look at the pavement here! can't you see the track worn by the faithful lover? Hurrah! she's mine! (*Sings.*) Victoria! (*No answer.*) Oh well, she's dressing now! (*To the BILLSTICKER.*) There's the dip-net, I see! Everybody at the opera is crazy about dip-nets . . . or rather about fishes! dumb fishes, because they can't sing. . . . What does a thing like that cost?

BILLSTICKER. Rather a lot!

OFFICER (*sings*). Victoria! . . . (*Shakes the linden-tree.*)

A DREAM PLAY

Why it's getting green again! for the eighth time! . . .
(*Sings.*) Victoria! . . . Now she's tidying her hair! . . .
(*To the DAUGHTER.*) Now, madam! let me go up and fetch my bride! . . .

PORTRESS. Nobody's allowed on the stage!

OFFICER. Seven years have I come here! Seven times three hundred and sixty-five makes two thousand five hundred and fifty-five! (*Stops and pokes at the door with the clover-shaped hole.*) . . . To think that I've seen that door two thousand five hundred and fifty-five times without finding out where it leads! And that clover leaf for letting in the light . . . who does it let the light in for? is there anyone inside? does anybody live there?

PORTRESS. I don't know! I've never seen it opened! . . .

OFFICER. It looks like a pantry door which I saw when I was four years old, one Sunday afternoon when I went out with the maid. We went to call on other maids, but I never got further than the kitchen, where I sat between the water-barrel and the salt-box. I've seen so many kitchens in my time, and the pantries were invariably out on the landing, with round holes bored in the door, and another like a clover leaf. . . . But the opera-house can't have any pantry; they haven't even got a kitchen! (*Sings.*) Victoria! . . . I say, madam! I suppose she can't be coming out any other way?

PORTRESS. No, there is no other way!

OFFICER. Good! then I'm bound to meet her! (*The theatre people come running out, closely scanned by the OFFICER.*)

*

OFFICER. She's sure to be here soon! . . . Madam!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

that blue monkshood out there! I've known it since I was a child . . . is it the same one? . . . I remember at a country parsonage, when I was seven . . . there were two doves, two blue doves under that hood . . . but then there came a bee and found its way under the hood. . . . Now I have you! thought I, and grabbed hold of the flower. But the bee stung through it, and I cried . . . but then the pastor's wife came and put wet earth on the place . . . we had strawberries and cream for supper afterwards! . . . I believe it's getting dark already. – Where are you going, Billsticker?

BILLSTICKER. I'm going home to supper.

OFFICER (*rubbing his eyes*). Supper? this time of day? – Oh! may I go in and telephone to the Growing Castle for one moment?

DAUGHTER. What do you want there?

OFFICER. I'm going to tell the glazier to put double windows in. It will be winter soon and I'm terribly cold! (*Goes into the PORTRESS's lodge.*)

★

DAUGHTER. Who is Madam Victoria?

PORTRESS. She's his sweetheart!

DAUGHTER. A very good answer! What she is to us and other people doesn't matter to him! Simply what she is to *him* – that is what she is! . . .

(*It becomes dark quickly.*)

PORTRESS (*lighting the lantern*). It's getting dark quickly to-day!

DAUGHTER. To the gods a year is as a minute!

PORTRESS. And to human beings a minute may be as long as a year!

★

A DREAM PLAY

OFFICER (*comes in again. He looks dusty; the roses are withered*). Hasn't she come yet?

PORTRESS. No!

OFFICER. She'll certainly come . . . *she'll come!*
(*Walks up and down.*) . . . Still, perhaps it's best to give up that luncheon after all! . . . as it's evening already . . . Yes, I'll do so! (*Goes in and telephones.*)

*

PORTRESS (*to the DAUGHTER*). May I have my shawl now?

DAUGHTER. No, my friend: have a rest while I look after your duties . . . I want to get to know mankind: to know life, to find out whether it's as hard as it's said to be.

PORTRESS. But you can't go to sleep at your post here: never go to sleep, night or day. . . .

DAUGHTER. No sleep at night?

PORTRESS. Well, if you can get it, with the bell-string round your arm . . . you see there are night-watchmen on the stage, and they're changed every three hours. . . .

DAUGHTER. But that's torture. . . .

PORTRESS. So you think; but people like us are glad to get such a job. If you only knew how envied I am. . . .

DAUGHTER. Envied? Does one envy the tortured?

PORTRESS. Yes! . . . but I'll tell you what's worse than drudgery and night duty, and draughts and cold and damp, – and that is having to listen to the secrets of all the unhappy people up there. . . . I'm the one they come to: and why? Perhaps they read in the lines of my face the runes which suffering writes, and which invite confidences . . . in that shawl, my dear, are

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

hidden thirty years' agony, my own and that of others! . . .

DAUGHTER. It's heavy too, and it stings like nettles. . . .

PORTRESS. Wear it if you like. . . . When it gets too heavy, call me and I'll come and relieve you!

DAUGHTER. Farewell! What you can bear, surely I can!

PORTRESS. We shall see! . . . But be kind now to my little friends and don't get tired of their complaints.
(*Disappears in the passage.*)

(*The stage becomes pitch-dark. Under cover of the darkness the scenery is changed. The linden is stripped of its leaves: the blue monkshood withers quickly: and when the stage is light again the green space in the distance beyond the passage has become an autumnal brown.*)

OFFICER (*comes in when it is light again. He has grey hair now and a grey beard. His clothes are shabby, his collar soiled and limp. The bunch of roses has fallen to pieces, so that only the bare stems are seen. He walks up and down*). To judge by all appearances summer is over and autumn is near. — I can tell that by the linden, and the monkshood! . . . (*Walks up and down.*) But autumn is my spring, for that is when the theatre opens again! and then she *must* come! Dear lady, will you let me sit on this chair for a little while?

DAUGHTER. Do, my friend! I can stand!

OFFICER (*sitting down*). If only I could manage to get a little sleep, then it might not be so bad! . . . (*He falls asleep for a moment: then starts up and begins walking again; stops by the door with the clover-leaf and pokes at it*). This door now — it gives me no peace. . . . What is

A DREAM PLAY

there behind it? There must be something! (*Soft dance-music is heard from above.*) Ah, now they've begun the rehearsals! (*The stage is now lighted intermittently, as if by a lighthouse.*) What does this mean? (*Speaking in time with the blinking of the light.*) Light and dark – light and dark?

DAUGHTER (*imitating him*). Day and night – day and night! . . . A merciful Providence seeks to shorten your time of waiting! And that is why the days are flying, pursuing the nights! (*The light on the stage is now constant.*) The BILLSTICKER comes in with his dip-net and implements.)

OFFICER. Here comes the Billsticker, with his dip-net. . . . Has the fishing been good?

BILLSTICKER. Oh, quite! It's been a hot summer – a bit longer than usual . . . the net was good enough – not quite what I hoped for. . . .

OFFICER (*accentuating the words*). Not quite what I hoped for! . . . an excellent phrase! Nothing ever is what I hoped for! . . . since the thought is more than the deed – greater than the thing. . . . (*Walks up and down, striking the rose stems against the walls till the last leaves fall off.*)

BILLSTICKER. Hasn't she come down yet?

OFFICER. No, not yet, but she'll soon be here! . . . Do you know what there is behind that door?

BILLSTICKER. No, I've never seen that door open.

OFFICER. I shall telephone for a locksmith to come and open it! (*Goes into the lodge. The BILLSTICKER pastes up a bill and goes towards the door on the right.*)

DAUGHTER. What was wrong with the net?

BILLSTICKER. Wrong? Well, there wasn't really any-

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

thing wrong . . . but it wasn't what I'd expected, and so I didn't get quite so much fun out of it. . . .

DAUGHTER. What did you expect it to be like?

BILLSTICKER. Like? . . . Well, I can't exactly say. . . .

DAUGHTER. Let me say then! . . . You expected it to be what it *wasn't*! It had to be green, but not that green!

BILLSTICKER. You know all about it, lady, you do! all about it – and that's why they all come to you with their worries. . . . If you'd only listen to me too, just for once. . . .

DAUGHTER. I will, gladly. . . . Come in here and pour out your heart. . . . (*Goes into the lodge. The BILLSTICKER stands outside the window, speaking to her.*)

*

(It becomes pitch-dark again; then light, and now the linden becomes green again and the monkshood blooms. The sun shines on the greenery in the distance beyond the passage. The OFFICER comes on; he is old and white-haired now: ragged, with worn-out shoes. He carries the stems of the bunch of roses. Walks to and fro, slowly, like an old man. Then he reads the bill.)

*

(A BALLET GIRL comes in from the right.)

OFFICER. Has Madam Victoria gone?

BALLET GIRL. No, she hasn't!

OFFICER. Then I'll wait! I suppose she'll be coming soon?

BALLET GIRL (*seriously*). Yes, she's sure to!

OFFICER. Don't go away now: then you'll be able to see what's behind that door. I've sent for the locksmith!

A DREAM PLAY

BALLET GIRL. It'll be awfully interesting to see that door opened. That door and the Growing Castle – have you ever heard of the Growing Castle?

OFFICER. Have I! – why, I've been a prisoner there!

BALLET GIRL. It was you, was it? But why did they keep such a lot of horses there?

OFFICER. It was a stable castle of course. . . .

BALLET GIRL (*distressed*). How stupid of me! fancy my not seeing that!

★

(A CHORUS SINGER *comes in from the right.*)

OFFICER. Has Madam Victoria gone?

CHORUS SINGER (*seriously*). No, she hasn't gone! she never does go!

OFFICER. That's because she loves me! . . . Now don't go before the locksmith comes to open this door.

CHORUS SINGER. Oh? is the door going to be opened? How interesting! . . . I just want to ask the Portress something.

★

(*The PROMPTER comes in from the right.*)

OFFICER. Has Madam Victoria gone?

PROMPTER. Not so far as I know!

OFFICER. There! didn't I say she was waiting for me! – Don't go before the door's opened.

PROMPTER. Which door?

OFFICER. Is there more than one door?

PROMPTER. Now I understand: the one with the clover leaf! . . . In that case I'll certainly stay! I'm just going to have a little chat with the Portress!

★

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

(*The BALLET GIRL, the CHORUS SINGER and the PROMPTER form a group with the BILLSTICKER outside the PORTRESS's window, and speak in turn to the DAUGHTER. The GLAZIER comes in through the gate.*)

OFFICER. Are you the locksmith?

GLAZIER. No, the locksmith had visitors: I suppose a glazier's just as good.

OFFICER. Oh, certainly, certainly . . . but have you got your diamond with you?

GLAZIER. Of course I have! A glazier without his diamond! What good would that be?

OFFICER. None at all!—Let's get to work then! (*Claps his hands. All the characters group themselves round the door. CHORUS MEN dressed as Mastersingers, and figurantes as the dancers in 'Aida' come in from the right and join them.*)

*

OFFICER. Locksmith—or Glazier—do your duty! (*The GLAZIER comes forward with his diamond.*) A moment such as this seldom occurs twice in a lifetime. For this reason, my friends, I beg you . . . to consider carefully . . .

A POLICEMAN (*coming forward*). In the name of the law, I forbid the opening of this door!

OFFICER. Good Lord, what a fuss the moment one wants to do anything new and great! . . . But we'll go to law about it! . . . To the Lawyer then! Then we shall see whether the law still holds good!—To the Lawyer!

*

(*Without any lowering of the CURTAIN the scene changes to a lawyer's office, in the following manner. The gate*

A DREAM PLAY

remains, serving the purpose of a doorway in the railing which runs right across the stage. The Portress's lodge becomes the Lawyer's writing compartment, but is open in front. The linden, now leafless, has become a coat-and-hatstand. The notice-board is covered with proclamations and decrees of the court. The four-leaved clover door now belongs to a cupboard for documents.

The LAWYER, in evening dress, with white tie, is sitting accordingly to the left, inside the doorway, at a desk covered with papers. His appearance bears witness to indescribable sufferings; his face is chalk-white and furrowed, with violet shades. He is ugly, and his face mirrors all the various crimes and vices with which, from the nature of his business, he has necessarily come into contact.

One of his two clerks has lost an arm, the other an eye.

The people who had assembled to witness the 'Opening of the Door' are still present, but seem now to be waiting admission to the office, and look as if they had always been standing there.

The DAUGHTER, wearing the shawl, and the OFFICER are in front.)

LAWYER (*going up to the DAUGHTER*). May I have that shawl, sister . . . I'll hang it up in here till I have a fire in the grate; and then I'll burn it, with all its griefs and miseries . . .

DAUGHTER. Not yet, brother; I want to get it quite full first, and I want especially to get all your own sufferings into it, all the confidences which you have received about crimes, vices, ill-gotten gains, slanders, abuse . . .

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

LAWYER. My little friend, your shawl would never hold all that! Look at these walls; doesn't the paper look as if it were stained by every kind of sin? Look at these papers on which I write tales of wrong; look at *me* . . . no human being ever comes here with a smile; nothing but angry looks, snarling lips, clenched fists . . . and all of them squirt their malice, their envy, their suspicions over me . . . Look! my hands are black, and can never be washed clean; see how they are cracked and bleeding . . . I can never keep clothes more than a few days – they stink of other people's crimes . . . sometimes I have the place fumigated with sulphur, but it doesn't help; I sleep close by, and I dream only of crimes. . . . Just now I have a murder case in court . . . that's not so bad, but do you know what is worse than anything? . . . Separating married people! – Then a cry seems to come from heaven above and the earth beneath . . . a cry of treason against the primal power, against the source of good, against love. . . . Besides, after reams of paper have been filled with mutual accusations, if some kindly person eventually takes one of them apart, and with a pinch on the ear and a smile asks the simple question, What have you really got against your husband – or your wife? – well, he, or she, will stand speechless – cannot think of any reason! On one occasion – oh, I think it was about a salad, another time about a word, usually about nothing. But the tortures, the suffering! These I have to bear! . . . Look at my face! Do you think that I, looking like a criminal as I do, could ever get a woman to return my love? Do you think anybody would care to be friends

A DREAM PLAY

with a man who has to collect all the debts, all the money debts of the town? . . . It's misery to be a man!

DAUGHTER. Men are pitiable creatures!

LAWYER. They are indeed! And what people live on is a puzzle to me! They marry on an income of one hundred, when they need two hundred . . . they borrow, of course, they all borrow! They manage to rub along somehow, by the skin of their teeth, till they die . . . and then the estate is always in debt! Who has to pay in the end I really don't know!

DAUGHTER. He who feeds the birds!

LAWYER. Yes! but if He who feeds the birds would come down to this earth of His and see the plight of the poor children of men, perhaps compassion would come over Him . . .

DAUGHTER. Men are pitiable creatures!

LAWYER. Yes, that is the truth! — (*To the OFFICER.*) What do you want?

OFFICER. I just wanted to ask if Madam Victoria had gone!

LAWYER. No, she hasn't: you needn't worry about that . . . what are you poking at my cupboard for?

OFFICER. I thought the door was so like . . .

LAWYER. Oh, no, no! — Oh, no!

(*Church bells are heard.*)

*

OFFICER. Is there a funeral in the town?

LAWYER. No, it's a graduation — a conferment of doctors' degrees. I myself am just going to take the degree of Doctor of Law. Perhaps you might feel inclined to graduate and receive a laurel wreath?

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

OFFICER. Yes, why not? It would be a little distraction anyhow . . .

LAWYER. Perhaps we ought to proceed at once to the solemn rite? – Hadn't you better go and change your clothes?

(The OFFICER goes out; the stage is now darkened while the following changes take place. The railing remains, serving now as the chancel rail of a church; the notice-board is used for indicating the numbers of the hymns; the linden hatstand becomes a candelabrum; the lawyer's desk becomes the President's pulpit; and the four-leaved clover door now leads to the vestry. . . . The Chorus from 'The Mastersingers' turn into ushers with staves, and the figurantes carry laurel wreaths.

The rest of the people act as spectators.

The backcloth is raised and the new one represents one huge organ, with the keyboards below and the mirror above.

Music is heard. At the sides are seen the four Faculties, Philosophy, Theology, Medicine and Jurisprudence. The stage remains empty for a moment.

The USHERS come forward from the right.

The FIGURANTES follow, with laurel wreaths in their outstretched hands.

THREE CANDIDATES come forward successively from the left, are crowned by the FIGURANTES, and go out to the right.

The LAWYER comes forward to receive his wreath.

The FIGURANTES turn away, refusing to crown him, and go out.

A DREAM PLAY

*The LAWYER, greatly agitated, leans against a pillar.
All the others retire, and the LAWYER is left alone.)*

*

DAUGHTER (*comes in with a white veil over her head and shoulders*). Look! I've washed the shawl . . . But why are you standing here? Didn't you get your wreath?

LAWYER. No, I was not worthy.

DAUGHTER. Why? Because you defended the poor, put in a good word for the wrongdoer, eased the burden of the guilty, obtained a respite for the condemned . . . alas for mankind! . . . angels they are not, but they are pitiable nevertheless.

LAWYER. Speak no evil of mankind; after all, it's my business to plead for them. . . .

DAUGHTER (*leaning against the organ*). Why do they strike their friends in the face?

LAWYER. They know no better!

DAUGHTER. Let us enlighten them! Will you? You and I together!

LAWYER. Enlightenment they will not receive! . . . Oh, that our complaint might reach the gods of heaven. . . .

DAUGHTER. It shall reach the throne! . . . (*Turns round towards the organ*.) Do you know what I see in this mirror? . . . The world the right way up! . . . Yes, for by nature it's upside down!

LAWYER. How did it become upside down?

DAUGHTER. When the copy was made. . . .

LAWYER. Yes, that's the word – copy! I always sus-

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

pected it was a faulty copy . . . and when I began to remember the forms of the original I became dissatisfied with everything . . . People called it discontent, bits of the devil's glass in one's eye, and soon. . .

DAUGHTER. 'Tis a mad world truly! Look at these four faculties! . . . The government which upholds society pays all four of them: theology, the science of religion, continually attacked and ridiculed by philosophy, which claims to be wisdom itself! And medicine, which is always giving the lie to philosophy, and does not count theology as one of the sciences, but calls it superstition. . . . And they sit together in the same council, whose function it is to teach young men respect – for the University. Why, it's a madhouse! And woe to him who first recovers his senses!

LAWYER. The first to get to know it are the theologians. For their preparatory studies they take philosophy, which teaches them that theology is nonsense; after that they learn from theology that philosophy is nonsense! Madmen, surely?

DAUGHTER. And then jurisprudence, which serves all but the servants!

LAWYER. Justice, which when it tries to be just, becomes its champion's ruin! . . . Right, which so often spells wrong!

DAUGHTER. How you have bungled it all, O children of men! Children! – Come, you shall have a wreath from me . . . one that will suit you better! (*Puts a crown of thorns on his head.*) Now I will play to you! (*Sits herself at the organ and plays a Kyrie; but instead of organ-tones human voices are heard.*)

A DREAM PLAY

CHILDREN'S VOICES. O everlasting God! (*The last note is sustained.*)

WOMEN'S VOICES. Have mercy upon us! (*The last note is sustained.*)

MEN'S VOICES (*tenors*). Deliver us for Thy tender mercy's sake! (*The last note is sustained.*)

MEN'S VOICES (*basses*). Spare Thy children, O Lord, and be not bitter against us!

*

ALL. Have mercy upon us! hear us! Have compassion on us mortals! — O Eternal One, why art Thou so far? . . . Out of the depths we call, Be merciful, O Eternal One! Make not the burden too heavy for Thy children! Hear us! hear us!

*

(*The stage becomes dark. The DAUGHTER rises and comes near the LAWYER. By a change in the lighting the organ is changed into Fingal's Cave. The sea comes flooding in among the basalt pillars, producing a mingled harmony of waves and winds.*)

LAWYER. Where are we, sister?

DAUGHTER. What do you hear?

LAWYER. I hear drops falling . . .

DAUGHTER. They are the tears that men weep . . . What else do you hear?

LAWYER. Sighing . . . and whining . . . and wailing . . .

DAUGHTER. Thus far the complaint of mortals has come . . . no further. But why this endless complaining? Is there nothing in life to rejoice at?

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

LAWYER. Yes, the sweetest, which is also the bitterest – love! wife and home! the highest and the lowest!

DAUGHTER. May I try it!

LAWYER. With me?

DAUGHTER. With you! You know the rocks, the stones on which one stumbles. Let us avoid them!

LAWYER. I am poor!

DAUGHTER. What does that matter so long as we love each other? And a little beauty costs nothing!

LAWYER. I have dislikes which may be your likes.

DAUGHTER. They can be adjusted!

LAWYER. And if we get tired?

DAUGHTER. Then the child comes, bringing with it a distraction that is always new!

LAWYER. You, you will take me, poor and ugly, despised, rejected?

DAUGHTER. Yes! let us unite our destinies!

LAWYER. So be it then!

(A very simple room inside the Lawyer's office. To the right is a large double bed with curtains; near it a window. To the left is a portable stove with cooking utensils. KRISTIN is pasting strips of paper on the inner windows. At the back is an open door leading to the office. Outside are seen some poor people waiting for admission.)

KRISTIN. I paste, I paste!

DAUGHTER *(pale and worn, is sitting by the stove)*. You're shutting out the air! I'm suffocating!

KRISTIN. Now there's only one tiny crack left!

DAUGHTER. Air, air! I can't breathe!

KRISTIN. I paste, I paste!

LAWYER. That's right, Kristin; heat is precious!

DAUGHTER. Oh, it's like having one's mouth glued up!

LAWYER *(standing in the doorway with a paper in his hand)*. Is the child asleep?

DAUGHTER. Yes, at last!

LAWYER *(gently)*. This crying frightens away my clients!

DAUGHTER *(pleasantly)*. What can we do about it?

LAWYER. Nothing!

DAUGHTER. We must take a bigger flat!

LAWYER. We've got no money!

DAUGHTER. May I open the window? This foul air is choking me.

LAWYER. Then the warmth will escape and we shall freeze!

DAUGHTER. This is terrible! . . . Can we do some scrubbing in there then?

LAWYER. You aren't strong enough to do any scrubbing, nor I either; and Kristin must go on pasting;

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

she must paste up the whole house, every crack, in ceiling, floor and walls!

DAUGHTER. Poverty I was prepared for, not dirt!

LAWYER. Poverty is always more or less dirty!

DAUGHTER. This is worse than I dreamt of!

LAWYER. Others are worse off! There's still food in the pot!

DAUGHTER. But what sort of food? . . .

LAWYER. Cabbage is cheap, nourishing and nice!

DAUGHTER. For those who like cabbage! To me it's disgusting!

LAWYER. Why didn't you say so?

DAUGHTER. Because I loved you! I was willing to sacrifice my taste!

LAWYER. Then I must sacrifice to you my taste for cabbage! sacrifices must be mutual!

DAUGHTER. What are we to eat then? Fish? but you hate fish.

LAWYER. And it's expensive!

DAUGHTER. Things are harder than I could have believed!

LAWYER (*kindly*). Yes, they are hard! . . . And the child, that should have been the link between us, and a blessing . . . becomes our ruin!

DAUGHTER. Dearest, I am dying in this air, in this room with its backyard outlook, with its baby cries through endless hours of sleeplessness: with those people out there, and their wailings and quarrels and accusations . . . Here I can only die!

LAWYER. Poor little flower – no light, no air. . . .

DAUGHTER. And you say there are people worse off!

A DREAM PLAY

LAWYER. I am one of the envied ones among my neighbours here.

DAUGHTER. I could put up with all the rest if only I could have some beauty in my home!

LAWYER. I know you're thinking of some flower – a heliotrope in particular. But that costs one and sixpence – the price of six quarts of milk, or half a bushel of potatoes.

DAUGHTER. I would gladly go without food to have my flower.

LAWYER. There is a kind of beauty which costs nothing. Not to have it in one's home is sheer torture for any man with a sense of beauty!

DAUGHTER. What is that?

LAWYER. If I tell you you'll get angry!

DAUGHTER. We've agreed not to get angry!

LAWYER. We've agreed . . . we can put up with anything now, dear, except the short, hard accents . . . do you know those? Not yet!

DAUGHTER. They shall never be heard between us!

LAWYER. Not if it depends on me!

DAUGHTER. Tell me then!

LAWYER. Well, when I come into a house I look first of all to see how the curtains are draped . . . (*Goes up to the window curtain and puts it right.*) . . . If they hang like ropes or rags I soon go! . . . Then I have a look at the chairs . . . If they're arranged tidily, then I stay! . . . (*Puts a chair straight against the wall.*) After that I look at the candles in the candlesticks . . . If they're crooked, then the whole house is askew! (*Straightens a candle on the bureau.*) . . . That, my dear, is the beauty which costs nothing!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

DAUGHTER (*sinks her head on her breast*). Not the short accents, dear!

LAWYER. They were not short!

DAUGHTER. Yes, they were!

LAWYER. What the devil . . .

DAUGHTER. What sort of language is that?

LAWYER. Forgive me, Agnes! But I have suffered as much from your untidiness as you do from the dirt! And I haven't dared help put things straight myself; you'd get furious, just as if I were finding fault with you . . . ugh! shall we stop now?

DAUGHTER. Married life is terribly hard . . . harder than anything! One has to be an angel, I think!

LAWYER. Yes, I think so too!

DAUGHTER. I feel I'm beginning to hate you after this!

LAWYER. Woe to us then! . . . But let's prevent hatred! I promise never to make any more remarks about untidiness . . . though it's torture to me!

DAUGHTER. And I'll eat cabbage, though it's torment to me!

LAWYER. Result—life together in torment! One's pleasure, the other's pain!

DAUGHTER. Men are pitiable creatures!

LAWYER. You realize that?

DAUGHTER. Yes! but in God's name let's avoid the rocks, now that we know them so well!

LAWYER. Let us do so! Surely we're humane, enlightened people; surely we can overlook and forgive!

DAUGHTER. Yes, and smile at trifles!

LAWYER. We, we only, can do so! . . . You know, I read in to-day's *Morning* . . . by the way, where is the paper?

A DREAM PLAY

DAUGHTER (*embarrassed*). What paper?

LAWYER (*harshly*). Do I take in more than one?

DAUGHTER. Smile now, and don't speak harshly . . .
Your paper - I lit the fire with it. . . .

LAWYER (*violently*). The devil you did!

DAUGHTER. Smile now! . . . I burnt it because it
mocked at what to me is holy . . .

LAWYER. And to me unholy! teha! . . . (*Claps his
hands together, beside himself.*) I will smile, smile so that
my back teeth show. . . . I'll be humane and swallow
my opinions: say yes to everything, and cringe and
play the hypocrite! So you've burnt my paper, have
you? (*Tidies the bed-curtains.*) There! now I'm going to
tidy the place again till you get angry. . . . Agnes, this
is simply impossible!

DAUGHTER. Of course it is!

LAWYER. And yet we must hold out, not for our
vows' sake, but for the child's!

DAUGHTER. Yes, that is true! for the child's sake!
Oh! - oh! . . . we must hold out!

LAWYER. And now I must go and see my clients!
Listen to them growling with impatience to rend one
another, to get one another fined and imprisoned . . .
poor lost souls . . .

DAUGHTER. Wretched, wretched creatures! And all
this pasting! (*She bows her head on her breast in dumb despair.*)

KRISTIN. I paste, I paste!

(*The LAWYER stands by the door, fingering the handle
nervously.*)

DAUGHTER. Oh, how that handle does squeak! it
feels as though you were twisting my heart-strings. . . .

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

LAWYER. I twist, I twist . . .

DAUGHTER. Don't!

LAWYER. I twist . . .

DAUGHTER. No!

LAWYER. I . . .

*

OFFICER (*from inside the office, taking hold of the handle*).
Permit me!

LAWYER (*letting go of the handle*). Certainly! since
you've got your degree!

OFFICER. All life is now mine! every path lies open
for me: I have set foot on Parnassus: the laurels are
won: immortality, fame — all are mine!

LAWYER. What will you live on?

OFFICER. Live on?

LAWYER. I imagine you'll want a house, clothes, food?

OFFICER. That's always to be had, if only you've
some one to love you!

LAWYER. Fancy that now! . . . fancy! . . . Paste,
Kristin! . . . paste! till they can't breathe! (*Goes out
backwards, nodding.*)

KRISTIN. I paste, I paste! till they can't breathe!

*

OFFICER. Are you coming with me now?

DAUGHTER. At once! but where?

OFFICER. To Fairhaven! It's summer there: there
the sun is shining, there are youth, children and flowers:
song and dance, feasting and revelry!

DAUGHTER. Then I'll go there!

OFFICER. Come!

*

A DREAM PLAY

LAWYER (*coming in again*). I shall go back now to my first hell . . . this one here was the second . . . and the worst! The sweetest hell is the worst. . . . There, she's gone and left her hairpins all over the floor again! . . . (*Picks some off the floor.*)

OFFICER. So he's discovered the hairpins too!

LAWYER. What do you mean by 'too'? . . . Look at this one! two prongs, but only one pin! two, and yet one! If I straighten it out it becomes one single piece of wire! if I bend it, it becomes two, without ceasing to be one! In other words—the two are one! But if I break it in half—like this—then the two are two! (*Breaks the hairpin and throws away the pieces.*)

OFFICER. So he's seen all that! . . . But before you can break it the prongs must diverge! If they converge the thing holds together!

LAWYER. And if they are parallel—then they never meet: then it neither holds nor breaks.

OFFICER. The hairpin is the most perfect of all created things! a straight line which is equal to two parallel straight lines!

LAWYER. A lock that shuts when it's open!

OFFICER. Which shuts, when it is open, a plait of hair which remains loose while it is being bound. . . .

LAWYER. It's like this door! When I close it, I open—the way out—for you, Agnes! (*Withdraws, closing the door.*)

★

DAUGHTER. Well?

(*The scene changes: the bed with its curtains is transformed into a tent; the stove remains; the backcloth is raised;*

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

on the right, in the foreground, are seen burnt hill-sides with red heather and tree stumps that are black and white after a forest fire; red pigsties and outhouses. Below these an open-air establishment for mechanical treatment of the sick, where men and women are being exercised on machines resembling instruments of torture. On the left, in the foreground, some of the open sheds belonging to the quarantine station, with ovens, brick furnaces and rows of pipes. In the middle distance is a strait. The backcloth represents a beautiful wooded shore, with flag-decorated landing-stages, where white boats are moored, some with sails set, and some without. Through the trees on the shore are seen little Italian villas, pavilions, kiosks and marble statues. The QUARANTINE OFFICER, got up as a blackamoor, is walking along the shore.)

OFFICER (*goes up to him and shakes hands*). What, Ordström? You here?

QUARANTINE OFFICER. Yes, I'm here!

OFFICER. Is this Fairhaven?

QUARANTINE OFFICER. No—over there; this is Foul-strand!

OFFICER. Then we've come all wrong!)

QUARANTINE OFFICER. We?—Won't you introduce me?

OFFICER. No, that would hardly do! (*Half aloud.*) It's Indra's own daughter!

QUARANTINE OFFICER. Indra's? I thought it must be Varuna himself! . . . Well, aren't you surprised to see me with my face all black?

OFFICER. My son, I am past fifty; at that age one ceases to be surprised!—I assumed at once that you were going to a fancy-dress ball this afternoon!

A DREAM PLAY

QUARANTINE OFFICER. Quite correct! I hope you're coming too?

OFFICER. Certainly; you see, here . . . well, it doesn't look very attractive! . . . What sort of people live here?

QUARANTINE OFFICER. The sick live here – over there the healthy!

OFFICER. Only poor people here then?

QUARANTINE OFFICER. No, my boy, it's here you have the rich! Look at that man on the rack! He has eaten too much goose-liver and truffles, and drunk so much Burgundy that his feet have gone knobbly!

OFFICER. Knobbly?

QUARANTINE OFFICER. Yes, he's got knobbly feet! . . . And that one lying on the guillotine; he's drunk so much Hennessy that his backbone has to be mangled out!

OFFICER. There's always something wrong!

QUARANTINE OFFICER. Besides these you'll find on this side all those who have some misery to conceal! Look at this one, for instance!

(An elderly fop in a Bath-chair is wheeled on to the stage. He is accompanied by a gaunt and hideous coquette of sixty, dressed in the latest fashion, and attended by the 'friend', a man of forty.)

OFFICER. Why, it's the Major! our schoolfellow!

QUARANTINE OFFICER. Don Juan! You see he's still in love with the spectre at his side. He doesn't see that she's grown old – that she's ugly, faithless, cruel.

OFFICER. There's real love for you! I should never have thought such a flighty fellow as he is would have been capable of loving so deeply and so earnestly!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

QUARANTINE OFFICER. That's a nice way of looking at it, yours!

OFFICER. I've been in love myself, with Victoria . . . yes, I still walk about the corridor waiting for her. . . .

QUARANTINE OFFICER. So you're the fellow who walks about the corridor?

OFFICER. Yes, I'm the man!

QUARANTINE OFFICER. Well, have you got that door opened yet?

OFFICER. No, we're still fighting the case. . . . The Billsticker is out with his dip-net, you see, which delays the taking of evidence. . . . Meanwhile the glazier has put in the panes in the castle, which has grown half a story. . . . It's been an unusually good year this year . . . warm and damp!

QUARANTINE OFFICER. All the same you've had nothing like the heat I've had here!

OFFICER. What's the temperature of your ovens then?

QUARANTINE OFFICER. A hundred and ninety degrees, when we're disinfecting cholera suspects.

OFFICER. Is cholera about again then?

QUARANTINE OFFICER. Didn't you know that?

OFFICER. Of course I knew it: but I so often forget what I know!

QUARANTINE OFFICER. I often wish I could forget things — especially myself. That's why I go in for masquerades, fancy dress and private theatricals.

OFFICER. What have you been doing then?

QUARANTINE OFFICER. If I speak about it, they say I'm bragging: if I don't, they call me a hypocrite!

OFFICER. Is that why you've blackened your face?

A DREAM PLAY

QUARANTINE OFFICER. Yes! a shade blacker than I really am!

OFFICER. Who's this coming?

QUARANTINE OFFICER. Oh, that's a poet! he's going to have his mud-bath!

(*The POET comes in, with his eyes raised to heaven, carrying a pail of mud.*)

OFFICER. Heavens! he ought to have light baths and air baths!

QUARANTINE OFFICER. No, he keeps so much to the upper air that he gets home-sick for the mud . . . it makes the skin hard to wallow in the mire, just as it does with pigs. After his bath he doesn't feel the gad-flies sting!

OFFICER. It's a funny world – all contradictions! -

*

POET (*ecstatically*). Out of clay the god Ptah fashioned man on a potter's wheel, a lathe – (*sceptically*) or any other damned thing! . . . (*Ecstatically.*) Out of clay the sculptor fashions his more or less immortal masterpieces – (*sceptically*) Usually rubbish! (*Ecstatically.*) Out of clay are formed those vessels, so indispensable in the pantry, which bear the generic name of pots and plates – (*sceptically*) As if I cared what they're called! (*Ecstatically.*) Such is clay! When clay is a thin fluid it's called mud – *c'est mon affaire!* (*Calls*) Lina!

*

(*LINA comes in with a pail.*)

POET. Lina, show yourself to Miss Agnes! – She knew you ten years ago, when you were a young, happy and,

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

let us say, pretty girl. . . . Look at her now! Five children, drudgery, squalling, hunger, blows! See how beauty has perished, how joy has vanished, in the fulfilment of duties which ought to have given the inward content that express itself in the harmonious lines of the face and the quiet shining of the eye. . . .

QUARANTINE OFFICER (*putting his hand to the other's lips*). Shut up, shut up!

POET. That's what they all say! And then if one does keep silent they say 'Speak!' How impossible people are!

*

DAUGHTER (*going up to LINA*). Tell me your grievances!

LINA. I daren't: I should only get it worse!

DAUGHTER. Who could be so cruel?

LINA. I daren't say: if I did I should get beaten!

POET. That's how it is! But I *will* talk about it, even if the blackamoor knocks my teeth out for me! . . . I will say that injustice does occur. . . . Agnes, daughter of the gods! Do you hear music and dancing up there on the hill? — Well, that's Lina's sister come home from the town, where she went astray, you understand. . . . Now they're killing the fatted calf, while Lina, who stayed at home, has to go about with the slop-pail and feed the pigs! . . .

DAUGHTER. There is joy in the house because the wanderer has left the evil ways, not merely because she has come home! Remember that!

POET. Then arrange a ball and supper every evening for that blameless servant who has never gone astray: do that! That they never do: when Lina's free she

A DREAM PLAY

has to go to prayer meetings, to be reprimanded for not being perfect! Is that justice?

DAUGHTER. Your questions are so difficult to answer, because . . . there are so many unforeseen cases. . . .

POET. Caliph Harun the Just perceived that too! – Sitting peacefully on his throne on high, he could never see the plight of those below! At last complaints reached his lofty ear. So he stepped down one fine day, disguised himself, and went unobserved among the crowds, to find out what sort of justice they were getting!

DAUGHTER. Surely you don't take me for Harun the Just?

OFFICER. Let's talk about something else! . . . Here come strangers!

(A white boat, shaped like a dragon, with a light-blue silken sail on a gilt yard, and a gilded mast with a rose-red pennon, glides along the strait from the left. At the helm, with their arms round each other's waists, are sitting HE and SHE).

Behold, the perfect happiness, bliss without measure, the jubilation of young love!

(The stage becomes light.)

*

HE *(stands up in the boat and sings)*. Hail to thee, fairest bay,
Where I dwelt in my youth's first springtime,
Where I dreamed my earliest dreams,
My dreams of roses!
Behold me returning,
Not lonely as then!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

Forests and havens,
Heaven and sea,
Send her greeting!
My love and my bride,
My sun, my life!

(The flags on the landing-stages of Fairhaven are dipped in salute; white handkerchiefs are waved from villas and shores, and the music of harps and violins sounds over the strait.)

POET. See how they radiate light! Hark to the music sounding over the water! – Eros!

OFFICER. It's Victoria!

QUARANTINE OFFICER. What if it is?

OFFICER. It's *his* Victoria: I've got my own! Mine, that none shall ever see! . . . Now hoist the quarantine flag while I haul in the net! *(The QUARANTINE OFFICER waves a yellow flag. The OFFICER pulls in a line which causes the boat to turn in towards Foulstrand.)* Hold on there! *(HE and SHE now become aware of the hideous landscape, and show their disgust.)*

QUARANTINE OFFICER. Well, well! it's very trying! But all – all who come from infected districts must stop here!

POET. Fancy being able to speak like that, to act like that, when you see two human beings come together in love! Touch them not! lay not hands on love; that is high treason! . . . Alas, alas! all that is fair must now go down, down into the mud!

(HE and SHE step ashore, looking sorrowful and ashamed.)

HE. Alas! what have we done?

A DREAM PLAY

QUARANTINE OFFICER. It isn't necessary to have done anything to meet life's little discomforts!

SHE. How brief is joy and happiness!

HE. How long do we have to stay here?

QUARANTINE OFFICER. Forty days and forty nights!

SHE. We'd rather go and drown ourselves!

HE. Live here, among burnt-up hills and pigsties?

POET. Love overcomes everything, even sulphur fumes and carbolic acid!

*

QUARANTINE OFFICER (*lights the stove; blue sulphur fumes burst forth*). I'm lighting the sulphur now! Will you kindly step in?

SHE. Oh, my blue dress will lose its colour!

QUARANTINE OFFICER. And become white! Your red roses will also become white!

HE. And even your cheeks! Forty days!

SHE (*to the OFFICER*). That will please you!

OFFICER. No, it will not! . . . No doubt your happiness was the origin of my torment, but . . . it doesn't matter – I've got my degree now and a situation over there . . . heigh-ho! And in the autumn I shall get a post in a school . . . to teach the boys, the same lessons that I myself learnt throughout my childhood, throughout my youth, and shall now have to teach: the same lessons, throughout my manhood and in the end throughout my old age, the same lessons: what does twice two make? how many times will two go into four without remainder? . . . till I get a pension and have nothing to do but wait for meals and the papers – till at last I'm carried out to the crematorium

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

and burnt to ashes. . . . Have you no old pensioner out here? It's probably the worst thing after 'Twice two makes four'; to begin school again when one *has* taken one's degree; to go on asking the same questions till one dies. . . .

(An elderly man walks past with his hands behind his back.)

Look – there goes a pensioner, just waiting for the life to go out of him; probably a captain who failed to become a major, or a clerk who wasn't made an assessor. Many are called but few are chosen. . . . He walks about, waiting for breakfast. . . .

PENSIONER. No, for the paper! the morning paper!

OFFICER. And he's only fifty-four; he may go on another twenty-five years waiting for meals and the paper. . . . Isn't it dreadful?

PENSIONER. What is *not* dreadful? Tell me that! tell me that!

OFFICER. Yes, let him tell who can! . . . Now I'm going to teach boys, Twice two makes four! How many times will two go into four without remainder? *(Clutches his head in despair.)* And Victoria, whom I loved, and wished the greatest of earthly happiness . . . now she has her happiness, the greatest she can know, and meanwhile I suffer, . . . suffer, suffer!

SHE. Do you think I can be happy when I see you suffer. How can you think so? Perhaps it lightens your pain to know I shall be a prisoner here forty days and nights? Tell me, does it lighten your pain?

OFFICER. Yes, and no! I can't be happy while I see you suffering! oh!

A DREAM PLAY

HE. And do you think my happiness can be built on your torments?

OFFICER. We are pitiable creatures – all of us!

ALL (*stretching out their hands to heaven, utter a cry of anguish like a dissonant chord*). Oh!

DAUGHTER. O God eternal, hear them! Life is evil! Men are pitiable creatures!

ALL (*as before*). Oh!

*

(*The stage becomes pitch-dark for a moment, while all who are present either go out or take up new positions. When the stage is light again, Foulstrand is seen in the background, but in shadow. The strait lies in the middle distance and Fairhaven in the foreground, both fully lighted. To the right is a corner of the assembly rooms with open windows; inside it are seen couples dancing. On an empty box outside THREE SERVANT GIRLS are standing, clasping one another's waists and looking on at the dance. On the steps of the assembly rooms is a bench where UGLY EDITH is sitting, bareheaded and sad-looking, with long, dishevelled hair. In front of her is an open piano.*

To the left is a yellow wooden house.

Two children in summer dress are playing ball outside.

On the nearer side of the strait is a landing-stage with white boats, and flagstaffs with flags. A white warship is anchored in the strait, a brig with gun-ports. But the whole landscape is in winter dress, with snow on the leafless trees and on the ground.)

(*The DAUGHTER and the OFFICER come in.*)

*

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

DAUGHTER. Here is peace and happiness in holiday time! Work has ceased; every day a festival; everybody in holiday clothes; music and dancing even in the morning. (*To the SERVANT GIRLS.*) Why don't you go in and dance, girls?

SERVANTS. We?

OFFICER. But they're servants!

DAUGHTER. That's true! . . . But why is Edith sitting there instead of dancing?

(*EDITH hides her face in her hands.*)

OFFICER. Don't ask her! She's been sitting there three hours without being invited to dance. . . . (*Goes into the yellow house on the left.*)

DAUGHTER. What a cruel amusement!

*

MOTHER (*in a low-necked dress, comes out of the assembly rooms. She goes up to EDITH*). Why don't you go in as I told you?

EDITH. Because . . . I can't throw myself at people. I know I'm ugly, and that's why nobody cares to dance with me; but surely I needn't be reminded of the fact! (*Begins to play on the piano Sebastian Bach's Toccata con Fuga, No. 10*):



A DREAM PLAY

(The waltz from within the hall is heard faintly at first, but afterwards increases in volume as though it were fighting against the Toccata. But EDITH plays it down and reduces it to silence. Dancers appear in the doorway to listen to her playing; everybody on the stage stands reverently and listens.)

A NAVAL OFFICER *(seizes ALICE, one of the dancers, by the waist and leads her down to the landing-stage). Come, quick!*

(EDITH breaks off, rises and looks at them in despair. She remains standing, as if turned to stone.)

*

(The front wall of the yellow house is now removed, and three forms are seen, with boys sitting on them: among them the OFFICER, who looks worried and ill at ease. In front of them stands the MASTER, wearing spectacles, with chalk and cane.)

MASTER *(to the OFFICER)*. Now, my boy, can you tell me what twice two is?

(The OFFICER remains seated, painfully searching his memory without finding the answer.)

You should stand up when I ask you a question!

OFFICER *(rises, apprehensively)*. Twice . . . two . . . let me see . . . That makes two twos!

MASTER. Oho! so you've not prepared your lesson!

OFFICER *(ashamed)*. Yes, I have, but . . . I know what it is, but I can't say it. . . .

MASTER. You're trying to shuffle! You know, but you can't say! Perhaps I can assist you! *(Pulls his hair.)*

OFFICER. Oh, this is dreadful, dreadful!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

MASTER. Yes, it is dreadful: such a big boy, and no ambition. . . .

OFFICER (*in anguish*). A big boy! yes, I am big – much bigger than the others here. I'm grown up: I've finished with school. . . . (*As if waking up.*) Why, I've taken my degree! . . . Why am I sitting here then? Haven't I taken my degree?

MASTER. No doubt; but you've got to sit here and mature, you see. We must mature . . . isn't that so?

OFFICER (*clashing his head*). Yes, that is so: we must mature. . . . Twice two . . . is two, as I propose to demonstrate by analogy – the highest form of proof! Listen now! . . . Once one is one; therefore twice two is two! For that which applies to the one must also apply to the other!

MASTER. The proof is perfectly in accordance with the rules of logic; nevertheless the answer is incorrect!

OFFICER. Whatever is in accordance with the rules of logic cannot be incorrect! Let us test the case! One into one goes once: therefore two into two goes twice!

MASTER. Quite correct according to analogy. But how much is once three?

OFFICER. Three!

MASTER. Consequently twice three is also three!

OFFICER (*thoughtfully*). No, that cannot be right . . . it cannot be . . . for if so . . . (*Sits down in despair.*) No, I am not mature yet!

MASTER. No, you're very far from that. . . .

OFFICER. How long shall I have to stay here then?

MASTER. How long? Do you believe that time and space exist? . . . Assuming that time does exist, then

A DREAM PLAY

you ought to be able to tell us what time is! What is time?

OFFICER. Time? (*Considers.*) I can't say, though I know what it is: *ergo*, I may know what twice two is, without being able to say! Can you say yourself what time is?

MASTER. Of course I can!

ALL THE BOYS. Tell us then!

MASTER. Time? . . . Let me see! (*Remains standing motionless, with his finger on his nose.*) While we are speaking, time flies. Consequently time is something which flies while I am speaking!

A BOY (*getting up*). You're speaking now, sir, and while you're speaking, I fly; consequently I am time! (*Flies.*)

MASTER. That is quite correct according to the rules of logic!

OFFICER. Then the rules of logic are absurd. Nils, who fled away then, cannot be time!

MASTER. That is also quite correct according to the rules of logic, even though it is absurd.

OFFICER. Then logic is absurd!

MASTER. It really seems so! But if logic is absurd, then the whole world is absurd . . . and I'll be damned if I sit here and teach you absurdities! . . . If there's anybody to stand us a drink we'll go and bathe!

OFFICER. That's a *posterus prius* – a world turned upside down! It's usual to bathe first and have one's drink afterwards! You old fossil!

MASTER. Don't be so stuck-up, Doctor!

OFFICER. Captain, if you please. I'm an Officer, and

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

I don't understand why I should sit here to be insulted among a lot of schoolboys. . . .

MASTER (*raising his finger*). We had to mature, you know!

*

QUARANTINE OFFICER (*coming in*). The quarantine is beginning!

OFFICER. Oh, there you are! Fancy this fellow making me sit on a school bench when I've taken my degree!

QUARANTINE OFFICER. Then why don't you go away?

OFFICER. Why indeed! . . . Go away? That's not so easy!

MASTER. So I should think! Just try!

OFFICER (*to the QUARANTINE OFFICER*). Save me! save me from his eye!

QUARANTINE OFFICER. Come now! . . . Come and help us dance. . . . We must dance before the plague breaks out! We really must!

OFFICER. Is the ship leaving then?

QUARANTINE OFFICER. The ship will leave first! . . . There'll be some tears shed of course!

OFFICER. Always tears: when she comes, and when she goes! . . . Let's go!

(*They go out. The MASTER continues his lesson in silence.*)

*

(*The SERVANT GIRLS who had been standing by the window of the dancing hall, walk sadly down to the landing-stage.*

EDITH, who had been standing motionless at the piano, follows them.)

A DREAM PLAY

DAUGHTER (*to the OFFICER*). Isn't there one single happy person in this paradise?

OFFICER. Yes, there's a newly married couple! Listen to them!

*

(*The newly married couple comes in.*)

HUSBAND (*to the WIFE*). My happiness is so unspeakable that I could gladly die. . . .

WIFE. Why die?

HUSBAND. Because in the midst of happiness grows the seed of unhappiness; it consumes itself like a flame of fire. . . . It cannot burn for ever, but must die out; this presentiment of the end annihilates bliss at its very climax.

WIFE. Let us die together, now, now!

HUSBAND. Die? Let us die then! For I fear Fortune – the deceitful jade!

(*They go towards the sea.*)

*

DAUGHTER (*to the OFFICER*). Life is evil! Men are pitiable creatures!

OFFICER. Look at that man coming now! He's the most envied mortal in the place!

(*The BLIND MAN is led in.*)

He's the owner of these hundred Italian villas; he owns all these bays, creeks, shores, woods, together with the fish in the water, the birds in the air, and the game in the woods. These thousand human beings are his tenants, and the sun rises over his sea, and sets over his lands. . . .

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

DAUGHTER. Well, does he complain too?

OFFICER. Yes, and with good reason: he can't see!

QUARANTINE OFFICER. He's blind! . . .

DAUGHTER. The most envied of all!

OFFICER. Now he's going to see the ship go off, with his son on board!

*

BLIND MAN. I can't see, but I can hear! I hear the fluke of the anchor tearing the clay bottom, just as when the hook is drawn out of a fish, and the heart comes up with it through the gullet! . . . My son, my only child, is journeying across the wide ocean into alien lands; I can follow him only in thought; . . . now I can hear the chain rattling . . . and . . . there's something that goes flapping and snapping, like clothes drying on a line . . . wet handkerchiefs perhaps . . . and I can hear the sound of gasping and sobbing as if people were crying . . . is it the splashing of the little waves against the sides of the boat, or is it the girls on the shore . . . abandoned . . . comfortless? . . . I asked a child once why the sea was salt; the child, whose father was on a long voyage, replied at once, The sea is salt because sailors cry so much. But why do sailors cry so much? . . . Well, he said, because they're always having to go away . . . so they're always drying their handkerchiefs on the masts! . . . And why do people cry when they're sad? I asked. . . . Well, said he, that's because the glassy part of the eye must be washed sometimes so that one can see better! . . .

(The brig has now set sail and is gliding away; the girls on the shore wave their handkerchiefs and dry their eyes alter-

A DREAM PLAY

nately. *And now on the fore-topmast is hoisted the signal 'Yes' — a red ball on a white ground. ALICE waves triumphantly in reply.*)

DAUGHTER (*to the OFFICER*). What does that flag mean?

OFFICER. It means 'Yes.' It's the Lieutenant's 'yes' in red — red as the heart's blood, inscribed on the blue canvas of the sky!

DAUGHTER. What does 'no' look like then?

OFFICER. That is blue, like the tainted blood in blue veins . . . but look at Alice, how radiant she is!

DAUGHTER. And look how Edith is crying! . . .

BLIND MAN. Meet and part! part and meet! that is life! I met his mother! And then she went! Our boy was left me; now he is gone!

DAUGHTER. But he'll come back, won't he? . . .

BLIND MAN. Who is speaking to me? I have heard that voice before, in my dreams, in my youth, when the summer holidays began; in my newly married life, when my child was born; whenever life smiled I heard that voice, like the south wind's sighing, like a harp chord from above, like the angels' greeting as I feel it must be on Christmas Eve . . .

*

(*The LAWYER comes in, goes up to the BLIND MAN and whispers.*)

BLIND MAN. Really?

LAWYER. Yes, it's true! (*Goes to the DAUGHTER.*) Now you've seen most of it, but you haven't experienced the worst.

DAUGHTER. What can that be?

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

LAWYER. Reiterations . . . repetitions! . . . Going back! doing one's lessons over again. . . Come!

DAUGHTER. Where?

LAWYER. To your duties!

DAUGHTER. What are they?

LAWYER. Everything you abominate most! everything you don't want to do, and yet must do! To abstain, to renounce, to go without, to leave behind . . . everything that is unpleasant, repulsive, painful . . .

DAUGHTER. Are there no such things as pleasant duties?

LAWYER. They become pleasant when they are fulfilled . . .

DAUGHTER. When they no longer exist. . . Duty then is altogether unpleasant! What is pleasant then?

LAWYER. What is pleasant is sin.

DAUGHTER. Sin?

LAWYER. Yes, and punishment will follow! If I've had a pleasant day and evening, I suffer from hell's torments and an evil conscience next day.

DAUGHTER. How strange!

LAWYER. Yes, I wake up in the morning with a headache; and then begins the repetition, but a perverted repetition. For instance, everything that was pretty, pleasant and witty the night before, memory represents the next morning as ugly, repulsive and stupid. Pleasure seems to decay, and joy falls to pieces. What men call success is always a step towards the next failure. The successes I have had in life have been my ruin. Men have an instinctive horror of the prosperity of others; they think it unjust that fate should favour any one

A DREAM PLAY

man, and they seek accordingly to restore the equilibrium by rolling stones on to the road. To possess talent is a mortal danger; one may so easily starve to death! . . . However, go back to your duties, or I shall take proceedings against you, and we'll go through all three courts, one, two, three!

DAUGHTER. Go back? to the stove and cabbage pot, and the baby-clothes . . .

LAWYER. Yes, yes! there's a big wash to-day; we have to wash all the handkerchiefs . . .

DAUGHTER. Oh, must I do that again?

LAWYER. All life consists in doing things again. . . . Look at the master in there. . . . He took his degree yesterday, with laurel wreath and gun salute, climbed Parnassus and was embraccd by the monarch . . . and to-day he starts school again, asks how much twice two is, and will continuc so doing till he dies. . . . However, come back to your home!

DAUGHTER. I'd rather kill myself!

LAWYER. Kill yourself? You can't do that! In the first place it's dishonourable – even one's dead body is insulted: and secondly, . . . one is damned for it! . . . it's one of the deadly sins!

DAUGHTER. It is not easy – being a mortal!

★

ALL. Hear, hear!

★

DAUGHTER. I shall not go back with you to humiliation and dirt! . . . I would ascend to the place whence I came, but . . . the door must first be opened, so that

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

I may know the secret . . . I insist on the door being opened!

LAWYER. Then you must retrace your steps, return the way you came; put up with all the horrors, the repetitions, the redraftings, the reiterations of the lawsuit. . . .

DAUGHTER. Be that as it may, I must first go out into solitude and the wilderness, to find myself again! We shall meet later! (*To the poet.*) Come with me! (*A cry of lamentation far away beyond the background: 'Woe! woe! woe!'*) What was that?

LAWYER. The lost souls at Foulstrand!

DAUGHTER. Why do they complain to-day more than usual?

LAWYER. Because the sun is shining here—because there is music here, and dancing, and youth! That makes them feel their suffering so much more.

DAUGHTER. We must set them free!

LAWYER. Try! Once there came a liberator, but he was hanged on a cross!

DAUGHTER. By whom?

LAWYER. By all right-thinking men!

DAUGHTER. Who are they?

LAWYER. Don't you know who all right-thinking men are? You soon will, though!

DAUGHTER. Were they the ones who refused you your degree?

LAWYER. Yes!

DAUGHTER. Then I know them!

★

(A sea-coast on the Mediterranean. To the left, in the foreground, is seen a white wall, above which appear branches of orange-trees with fruit. In the background are villas, and a Casino with a terrace. To the right is a large heap of coal and two wheelbarrows. In the background, to the right, a strip of blue sea.)

TWO COALHEAVERS, *naked to the waist, with their faces and hands black, and the naked parts of their bodies, are sitting in despair on their wheelbarrows. The DAUGHTER and the LAWYER are seen in the background.*)

DAUGHTER. This is Paradise!

FIRST COALHEAVER. This is hell!

SECOND COALHEAVER. A hundred and twenty in the shade!

FIRST COALHEAVER. Shall we go and bathe?

SECOND COALHEAVER. Then the police'll come! No bathing allowed here!

FIRST COALHEAVER. Couldn't we pick an orange off that tree?

SECOND COALHEAVER. No, the police would come.

FIRST COALHEAVER. But I can't work in this heat; I shall just throw up the job.

SECOND COALHEAVER. Then the police'll come and nab you! . . . *(A pause.)* Besides, you won't have anything to eat . . .

FIRST COALHEAVER. Nothing to eat? It's we that do the most work that get the least food; and the rich, who do nothing, get the most! . . . Couldn't one—without taking liberties with the truth—call this unfair? . . . What does the Daughter of the Gods say?

*

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

DAUGHTER. I cannot answer! . . . But tell me ~ what have you done to get so black and to have such a hard life?

FIRST COALHEAVER. What have we done? We've been born of poor and fairly bad parents. . . . Perhaps punished once or twice!

DAUGHTER. Punished?

FIRST COALHEAVER. Yes; the unpunished live up there in the Casino, dining on eight courses and wine.

DAUGHTER (*to the LAWYER*). Can this be true?

LAWYER. On the whole, yes! . . .

DAUGHTER. You mean that every human being at some time or other has deserved imprisonment?

LAWYER. Yes!

DAUGHTER. Even you?

LAWYER. Yes!

*

DAUGHTER. Is it true the wretched creatures aren't allowed to bathe in the sea here?

LAWYER. No, not even with their clothes on! Only those who attempt to drown themselves get off paying. And they probably get beaten, up at the police station!

DAUGHTER. Can't they go outside the town and bathe, out in the country?

LAWYER. There is no country: it's all fenced in!

DAUGHTER. In the free, open spaces, I mean!

LAWYER. There's nothing free: somebody owns it all!

DAUGHTER. Even the sea ~ the great wide . . .

LAWYER. Everything! You can't go in a boat on the

A DREAM PLAY

sea and land anywhere without having it booked and paid for. It's fine!

DAUGHTER. This is not Paradise!

LAWYER. It certainly is not!

DAUGHTER. Why don't people do something to better their position. . . .

LAWYER. Doubtless they do; but all who try that end in prison or the madhouse. . . .

DAUGHTER. Who puts them in prison?

LAWYER. All right-thinking people, all decent . . .

DAUGHTER. Who puts them in the madhouse?

LAWYER. Their own despair, when they see that the struggle is hopeless!

DAUGHTER. Has it never occurred to anyone that there may be some mysterious reason for the present order of things?

LAWYER. Yes, those who are well off always think so!

DAUGHTER. That things are all right as they are? . . .

*

FIRST COALHEAVER. And yet we are the foundations of society. If you can't get coal the kitchen stove goes out, and the sitting-room fire, and the machines in the factory stop working; the lights go out in street and shop and home; darkness and cold are upon you . . . and that's why we sweat like hell, carrying the black coal. . . . What do you give us in return?

LAWYER (*to the DAUGHTER*). Help them . . . (*A pause.*) I recognize that things can't be quite the same for all: but need they differ so much?

*

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

(The GENTLEMAN and the LADY cross the stage.)

LADY. Are you coming to have a game with us?

GENTLEMAN. No, I must take a little walk to get an appetite for dinner!

*

FIRST COALHEAVER. To *get* an appetite?

SECOND COALHEAVER. To *get* . . . ?

(Some children come in; they shriek with horror when they catch sight of the grimy workers.)

FIRST COALHEAVER. They shriek when they catch sight of us! they shriek . . .

SECOND COALHEAVER. God damn them! . . . I suppose we'll have to get the scaffolds out soon and set to work on this rotten body . . .

FIRST COALHEAVER. God damn them, I say too! Curses on them!

*

LAWYER *(to the DAUGHTER)*. It's all wrong! People aren't so bad . . . but . . .

DAUGHTER. But . . . ?

LAWYER. But the Government . . .

DAUGHTER *(hides her face and goes out)*. This is not Paradise!

THE COALHEAVERS. No, it's hell – just hell!

Fingal's Cave. Long grey billows are rolling gently into the cave. In the foreground a red-painted bell-buoy is rocking on the waves, but does not give any sound till the place indicated. Music of the winds. Music of the waves.)

The DAUGHTER and the POET.

POET. Where hast thou led me?

DAUGHTER. Far from the hum and wailing of the children of men, to the utmost bounds of Ocean, to that cave whose name is 'Indra's Ear,' since here men say the King of Heaven listens to the complaints of mortals!

POET. What — here?

DAUGHTER. See'st thou not how the cave is formed like a shell! Yea, thou see'st it! Knowest thou not that thine ear is formed like a shell? Thou knowest, but hast not thought thereon. (*She picks up a shell from the shore.*) Hast thou never, as a child, held a shell to thine ear and listened . . . listened to the murmur of thy heart's blood, to the humming of thoughts in thy brain, to the snapping of a thousand little worn-out threads in the fabric of thy body? . . . All these canst thou hear in this little shell; think then what may be heard in this great one! . . .

POET (*listening*). I hear nothing but the sighing of the wind. . . .

DAUGHTER. Then I will be its interpreter! Listen! The Winds' complaint! (*Recites to soft music.*)

Born beneath the clouds of heaven,
Hunted were we of Indra's lightning-fires

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

Down to the dusty Earth . . .
Soiled were our feet, drenched by the sodden acres;
Dust of the country roads,
Smoke from the cities,
Evil draughts of breath,
Of food and fumes of wine,
Doomed were we to suffer . . .
Over the ocean wide we winged our way,
To fill our lungs with air,
To flutter our wings in flight,
To cleanse our muddied feet.
Indra, Lord of the Heavens,
Hear us!
Hark to our sighing!
Earth is all unclean,
Life a worthless boon,
Men nor good nor evil:
Living as they can,
From day to day.
Sons of the dust,
Through dust they wander,
Born of the dust
In dust they end.
Feet for tramping have they gained,
Wings possess not.
Soiled of the dust they grow –
Is the fault theirs,
Or thine?

*

POET. So heard I once awhile . . .

DAUGHTER. Hush! for the winds sing yet! (*Recites to soft music.*)

A DREAM PLAY

We are the winds, children of air,
Bearers of mortal wailing.
Us thou hast heard
On autumn eves in the chimneys,
In stove-vents singing,
In panes of windows,
When the rain wept tears on the roof-plates;
Through the long winter nights,
In snowy woods of pine:
On the gusty ocean
Hast thou not heard the lament
In rigging and sail? . . .
'Twas we, the winds,
Children of air,
Who from mortal breasts
That ourselves had pierced
Had learnt these notes of torture . . .
In sick-room,
On battle-field,
In the nursery most,
Where the new-born cry,
Lamenting, shrieking,
From the pain of being alive.
It is we, we, the winds,
That wail and whistle
'Woe, woe, woe!'

*

POET. Methinks that once before . . .

DAUGHTER. Hush! the waves are singing. (*Recites to soft music.*)

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

It is we, we, the waves,
That rock the winds
To rest!
Green-hued cradles we waves:
Wet we are, and salt;
Like unto flames of fire –
Wet flames are we.
Quenching and burning,
Cleansing and bathing,
Breeding, engendering;
We, we, the waves,
That rock the winds
To rest!

★

DAUGHTER. False waves and faithless; all on earth that is not burned is drowned – in the waves. – Look at this. (*Pointing to a heap of relics.*) Behold what the sea has stolen and shattered . . . Of the sunken ships the figure-heads alone remain . . . and the names: Justice, Friendship, Golden Peace, Hope – that is all that is left of Hope . . . delusive Hope! . . . Spars, rullocks, bails! And see! the lifebuoy, which saved itself, and let those in need perish!

POET (*searching in the heap*). Here is the name-board of the ship Justice: the same that left Fairhaven with the Blind Man's son on board. Sunk then! And on her too was Alice's sweetheart – Edith's hopeless love.

DAUGHTER. The Blind Man? Fairhaven? I must have dreamt it! And Alice's betrothed, ugly Edith, Foulstrand and the quarantine, the sulphur and carbolic acid, the conferment of degrees in the church, the

A DREAM PLAY

Lawyer's office, the corridor and Victoria, the Growing Castle and the Officer . . . All these I have dreamt. . . .

POET. I made a poem of them once!

DAUGHTER. Thou knowest then what poetry is. . . .

POET. Nay, I know what dreaming is. . . . What is poetry?

DAUGHTER. Not reality, but more than reality . . . not dreaming, but waking dreams. . . .

POET. And the children of men believe that we poets merely play . . . that we devise and invent!

DAUGHTER. 'Tis well, my friend: or the world would lie desolate for lack of inspiration. All men would be lying on their backs, gazing up to heaven; none would touch plough or spade, plane or mattock.

POET. Speakest thou so, Daughter of Indra, thou who half belongest to heaven. . . .

DAUGHTER. Rightly dost thou upbraid me; too long have I sojourned here below, bathing in the mud, even as thou . . . my thoughts can no longer fly; clay is on their wings . . . mould on their feet . . . and I myself – (*raising her arms*) – I sink, I sink. . . Help me, Father, God of Heaven! (*Silence.*) No longer do I hear His answer! the ether bears no more the sound from his lips to the shell of my ear . . . the silver thread is snapped . . . Woe is me, I am earthbound!

POET. Is it thy will to ascend . . . soon?

DAUGHTER. As soon as I have burnt this earthly element . . . the waters of the ocean cannot make me clean. Why askest thou?

POET. Because I have a prayer . . . a petition . . .

DAUGHTER. What kind of petition . . .

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

POET. A petition from humanity to the ruler of the universe, set forth by a dreamer!

DAUGHTER. To be presented by . . . ?

POET. Indra's daughter. . . .

DAUGHTER. Canst thou repeat thy poem?

POET. I can.

DAUGHTER. Speak it then!

POET. Rather thou!

DAUGHTER. Where can I read it?

POET. In my thoughts, or here! (*Gives her a roll of paper.*)

DAUGHTER. Well, I will speak it then! (*Takes the paper, but recites the poem from memory.*)

*

DAUGHTER. 'Wherefore art thou born in anguish,
Wherefore torturest thou thy mother,
Child of man, when thou art bringing
To her soul the joy maternal,
Joy all earthly joys excelling?
Wherefore must thy life's awakening,
Thy first greeting to the sunlight,
Be a cry of fury and of anguish?
Canst not greet thy life with smiling,
Child of man, since life's bestowal
Should be happiness itself?
Born are we like beasts that perish,
We, whose line descends from God and Man!
Meeter for the soul some nobler garment
Than this robe of filth and blood!
Must God's image change its teeth . . . '

A DREAM PLAY

Hush, too curious! let the work not blame the
Master!

Life's great riddle none hath answered yet! . . .

'Then begin the years of wandering
Over stones and thorns and thistles;
Goes thy way along some beaten track,
Straightway read the sign "Forbidden";
Dare to pluck a flower, and swift
Sounds the warning cry, "It is another's";
Comes a field athwart thy pathway
On the road that thou must go,
Lo, thou spoilst another's harvest;
Others then shall trample thine,
So the balance may be equal!
Every joy that doth befall thee
Brings to all thy fellows woe;
Yet thy woe brings no man gladness,
So is woe still heaped on woe!
Travellest on till thou art dead:
Death for thee is others' bread!"

With such words as these thou thinkest,
Son of dust, to approach the Almighty. . . ?

POET. How should son of dust discover
Words so light, so pure, so airy,
As might soar from Earth to Heaven?
Child of God, wilt thou interpret
Our lament into the speech
Comprehended by the Immortals?

DAUGHTER. I will!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

POET (*pointing to the buoy*). What is that floating there?
. . . a buoy?

DAUGHTER. Yes!

POET. It is like a lung with a windpipe!

DAUGHTER. It is the watchman of the sea. When danger is afoot it sings.

POET. Methinks the sea is rising and the waves begin to roll . . .

DAUGHTER. So it seems!

POET. Alas! What do I see? A ship . . . just off the rocks.

DAUGHTER. What ship can that be?

POET. I think it is the ghost-ship.

DAUGHTER. What is that?

POET. 'The Flying Dutchman.'

DAUGHTER. Is it he? Why is he punished so cruelly, and why does he not land?

POET. Because he had seven unfaithful wives.

DAUGHTER. Must he be punished for that?

POET. Yes! all right-thinking men condemned him. . . .

DAUGHTER. A strange world! . . . How then can he be freed from the curse?

POET. Freed? Not lightly would one set free . . .

DAUGHTER. Why not?

POET. Because . . . No, it is not the Dutchman! it is a common ship in distress! . . . Why then does the buoy give no sound? Look! the sea is rising, the waves run high; soon we shall be imprisoned in the cave! . . . The ship's bell is ringing now! — Soon we shall have one more figure-head here. . . . Cry out, buoy! do thy duty,

A DREAM PLAY

O watchman! . . . (*The buoy sings a four-part chord in fifths and sixths, like the sound of foghorns.*) The crew is waving to us . . . but we ourselves perish!

DAUGHTER. Dost thou not long for the liberation?

POET. Oh, yes, yes! but not now . . . and not by water!

*

THE CREW (*singing in four-part harmony*). Christ, Kyrie!



POET. They are calling now; and the sea calls! But none hears.

THE CREW (*as before*). Christ, Kyrie!

DAUGHTER. Who is that coming?

POET. Walking upon the water? There is only one who walks upon the water – not Peter, the solid rock, for he sank like a stone. . . .

(*A white glow appears over the sea.*)

THE CREW. Christ, Kyrie!

DAUGHTER. Is that He?

POET. It is He, the Crucified . . .

DAUGHTER. Why – tell me – why was He crucified?

POET. Because He wished to free . . .

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

DAUGHTER. Who were they – I have forgotten – that crucified Him?

POET. All right-thinking men.

DAUGHTER. What a strange world!

POET. The sea is rising! Darkness is overtaking us.
. . . The storm is growing . . .

*

(*The CREW shriek aloud.*)

POET. The crew cry out in horror when they behold their Saviour . . . And now . . . they leap overboard, fearing the Redeemer . . .

(*The CREW utter another shriek.*)

Now they cry out because they are going to die! Crying when they are born, and crying when they die!

(*The mounting waves threaten to drown them in the cave.*)

DAUGHTER. If I were sure it was a ship . . .

POET. In truth I do not believe it is a ship . . . it is a two-storied house, with trees in front . . . and . . . a telephone tower . . . a tower that reaches up to the skies. . . . It is the modern tower of Babel, sending wires aloft – to tell those above . . .

DAUGHTER. Child, the thought of man needs no metal wire for its flight . . . the prayer of the righteous forces its way through the worlds. . . . Surely this is no tower of Babel; would'st thou storm the heaven, storm it with thy prayers!

POET. No, it is not a house . . . not a telephone tower . . . see'st thou there?

DAUGHTER. What see'st thou?

A DREAM PLAY

POET. I see a snow-clad heath, a parade ground. . . . The winter sun is shining behind a church on the hill, and the tower casts its long shadow on the snow. . . . And now a troop of soldiers comes marching along the heath; they march along the tower, up the spire; now they are on the cross, but I seem to know that the first to tread on the weather-cock must die. . . . Now they are near it . . . the corporal at their head . . . ha-ha! a cloud comes sailing over the heath, passing over the sun . . . and now all is gone . . . the moisture of the cloud has quenched the sun's fire! – the sunlight created the shadow-image of the tower, but the shadow-image of the cloud quenched the shadow-image of the tower. . . .

(During the above speech the scene has again changed to the corridor of the theatre.)

DAUGHTER *(to the PORTRESS)*. Has the Lord Chancellor arrived yet?

PORTRESS. No!

DAUGHTER. The Deans then?

PORTRESS. No!

DAUGHTER. Call them at once then: the door is going to be opened. . . .

PORTRESS. Is it so urgent?

DAUGHTER. Yes. It is suspected that the solution of the world's riddle is stored up in there! . . . Summon the Lord Chancellor and the Deans of the four faculties then! *(The PORTRESS blows a whistle.)* And don't forget the Glazier and his diamond, or nothing can be done!

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

(The stage people come in from the left, as at the beginning of the play.)

OFFICER *(comes in at the back, in frock-coat and tall hat with a bunch of roses in his hand. Looks radiantly happy)*.
Victoria!

PORTRESS. Madam will be here in a minute!

OFFICER. Good! the carriage is waiting, the table is laid and the champagne is on ice. . . . Let me embrace you, madam. *(Embraces the PORTRESS.)* Victoria!

*

A WOMAN'S VOICE *(from above, sings)*. I am here!

OFFICER *(beginning to walk about)*. All right! I'm waiting.

*

POET. I seem to have lived through this before . . .

DAUGHTER. And I.

POET. Perhaps I have dreamt it?

DAUGHTER. Or made a poem of it perhaps?

POET. Or made a poem of it.

DAUGHTER. Then you know what poetry is.

POET. I know what dreaming is.

DAUGHTER. I feel as though we had spoken these words before, somewhere else.

POET. Then you will soon be able to work out for yourself what reality is!

DAUGHTER. Or dreaming!

POET. Or poetry!

*

(The LORD CHANCELLOR, the DEANS of the Faculties of Theology, Philosophy, Medicine and Jurisprudence.)

A DREAM PLAY

LORD CHANCELLOR. The question concerns the door, I understand! – What does the Dean of the Theological Faculty think about it?

DEAN OF THEOLOGY. I don't think – I believe . . . *credo* . . .

DEAN OF PHILOSOPHY. I regard . . .

DEAN OF MEDICINE. I know . . .

DEAN OF JURISPRUDENCE. I doubt, until I have heard evidence and witnesses!

LORD CHANCELLOR. Quarrelling again, are you? . . . Well, first of all, what does Theology believe?

DEAN OF THEOLOGY. I believe that this door ought not to be opened, because it conceals dangerous truths . . .

DEAN OF PHILOSOPHY. The truth is never dangerous.

DEAN OF MEDICINE. What is truth?

DEAN OF JURISPRUDENCE. *Whatever can be proved by two witnesses.*

DEAN OF THEOLOGY. Anything can be proved by two false witnesses – if you're a pettifogger.

DEAN OF PHILOSOPHY. Truth is wisdom; and wisdom, knowledge, is philosophy itself. . . . Philosophy is the science of sciences, the knowledge of knowledge; all other sciences are its servants.

DEAN OF MEDICINE. The only science is natural science: philosophy is no science at all – just empty speculation.

DEAN OF THEOLOGY. Bravo!

DEAN OF PHILOSOPHY (*to* DEAN OF THEOLOGY). Bravo, you say! And what are you, may I ask? You are the hereditary foe of all knowledge, the antithesis of science; you are ignorance and darkness . . .

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

DEAN OF MEDICINE. Bravo!

DEAN OF THEOLOGY (*to* DEAN OF MEDICINE). And you say Bravo! you who can't see further than the length of your nose in a magnifying-glass: you who believe in nothing but your own delusive senses – in your sense of sight, for example, which may be long-sighted, short-sighted, blind, purblind, squinting, one-eyed, colour-blind, red-blind, green-blind . . .

DEAN OF MEDICINE. Blockhead!

DEAN OF THEOLOGY. Ass!

(They fight.)

LORD CHANCELLOR. Peace! crows shouldn't pick each other's eyes out.

DEAN OF PHILOSOPHY. If I had to choose between those two, Theology and Medicine, I should choose – neither!

DEAN OF JURISPRUDENCE. And if I had to sit in judgment on you other three, I should condemn – you all! . . . You can't agree on one single point, and you never could! – Let's get back to the case once more! What are the Lord Chancellor's views as to this door and its opening?

LORD CHANCELLOR. Views? I have no views! I am merely appointed by the Government to see that you don't break one another's arms and legs in this court . . . while you are educating the young. Views? No, I take good care not to have any. There was a time when I had a few, but they were at once refuted. Views always are at once refuted – by one's opponents, of course! . . . Perhaps we can now have the door opened, even at the risk of its concealing dangerous truths?

A DREAM PLAY

DEAN OF JURISPRUDENCE. What is truth? what is the truth?

DEAN OF THEOLOGY. I am the truth and the life . . .

DEAN OF PHILOSOPHY. I am the knowledge of knowledge . . .

DEAN OF MEDICINE. I am the one exact knowledge . . .

DEAN OF JURISPRUDENCE. I doubt!

(They fight.)

*

DAUGHTER. For shame, teachers of youth!

DEAN OF JURISPRUDENCE. Lord Chancellor, delegate of the Government, head of the body of teachers, denounce this woman's offence! She has cried shame on you, which is contumelious language; moreover in a derisive, ironical sense she has called you teachers of youth, and that is slander.

DAUGHTER. Poor youth!

DEAN OF JURISPRUDENCE. She pities youth - tantamount to accusing *us*. Lord Chancellor, denounce her offence!

DAUGHTER. Yes, I accuse you, all of you together, of sowing doubt and dissension in the minds of the young.

DEAN OF JURISPRUDENCE. Listen to her! She herself raises doubts in the young as to our authority, and then accuses *us* of raising doubts. I ask all right-thinking men - is that not a criminal act?

*

ALL RIGHT-THINKING MEN. Yes, it is criminal.

DEAN OF JURISPRUDENCE. All right-thinking men have condemned you! - Go in peace, with your gains! Or else . . .

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

DAUGHTER. My gains? – Or else? Else what?

DEAN OF JURISPRUDENCE. Or else you'll be stoned.

POET. Or crucified.

DAUGHTER. I will go. Come with me, and you shall learn the riddle!

POET. Which riddle?

DAUGHTER. What does he mean by 'my gains'?

POET. Probably nothing. It's what we call nonsense. He was talking nonsense.

DAUGHTER. But that was what hurt me most!

POET. No doubt that's why he said it . . . Men are like that.

*

ALL RIGHT-THINKING MEN. Hurrah! the door is opened!

*

LORD CHANCELLOR. What was concealed behind the door?

GLAZIER. I can't see anything.

LORD CHANCELLOR. He can't see anything: I can quite believe it! . . . Deans! what was concealed behind the door?

DEAN OF THEOLOGY. Nothing! That is the solution of the world's riddle . . . Of nothing in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

DEAN OF PHILOSOPHY. From nothing proceeds nothing.

DEAN OF MEDICINE. Bosh! that is nothing.

DEAN OF JURISPRUDENCE. I doubt! Moreover there is some deception here. I appeal to all right-thinking men!

DAUGHTER (*to the POET*). Who are the right-thinking men?

A DREAM PLAY

POET. Yes, let him say who can! In most cases 'all right-thinking men' consists of one person. To-day it is I and mine, to-morrow you and yours. — One is nominated for the post: more correctly, one nominates oneself.

★

ALL RIGHT-THINKING MEN. We have been deceived!

LORD CHANCELLOR. Who has deceived you?

ALL RIGHT-THINKING MEN. The Daughter!

LORD CHANCELLOR. Will the Daughter be so good as to inform us what her idea was in having this door opened?

DAUGHTER. No, friends! If I told you, you wouldn't believe me.

DEAN OF MEDICINE. But there's nothing there.

DAUGHTER. You have said it. But you haven't understood!

DEAN OF MEDICINE. What she says is bosh.

ALL. Bosh!

DAUGHTER (*to the POET*). They are pitiable creatures.

POET. Do you mean that seriously?

DAUGHTER. Always seriously.

POET. And are right-thinking men also pitiable?

DAUGHTER. They perhaps most of all.

POET. And the four Faculties too?

DAUGHTER. They too, and by no means the least! Four heads, four minds, on one body! Who created that monster?

ALL. She doesn't answer!

LORD CHANCELLOR. Stone her then!

DAUGHTER. I have answered.

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

LORD CHANCELLOR. Listen! she is answering.

ALL. Stone her! she is answering.

DAUGHTER. Whether she answers, or doesn't answer – stone her! . . . Come, thou Seer, and I will tell you the riddle – but far from here – out in the wilderness where none can hear us, none can see us! For . . .

★

LAWYER (*comes forward and takes the DAUGHTER by the arm*). Have you forgotten your duties?

DAUGHTER. Good heavens, no! But I have higher duties.

LAWYER. And your child?

DAUGHTER. My child! what of it?

LAWYER. Your child is calling for you.

DAUGHTER. My child! Alas, I am bound to earth! . . . And this torture in my breast, this anguish . . . what is it?

LAWYER. Don't you know?

DAUGHTER. No!

LAWYER. It is the pangs of conscience.

DAUGHTER. Are these the pangs of conscience?

LAWYER. Yes! and they come after every neglected duty, after every pleasure, even the most innocent – if there are such things as innocent pleasures, which is doubtful; and after every suffering inflicted on one's neighbour.

DAUGHTER. And there is no remedy?

LAWYER. Yes, but only one! To fulfil one's duty at once. . . .

DAUGHTER. You look like a devil when you mention the word duty! – And when one has two duties to fulfil, as I have?

A DREAM PLAY

LAWYER. Fulfil first the one and then the other!

DAUGHTER. The highest first. . . . Look after my child, then, and I will do my duty. . . .

LAWYER. Your child is suffering because it misses you. . . . Can you bear to know that a human being is suffering because of you?

DAUGHTER. Unrest now is in my soul . . . it has been rent in twain, and is pulled in two directions!

LAWYER. Life's little discords, you see!

DAUGHTER. Oh, how it pulls!

*

POET. If you only knew what sorrow and desolation I have spread in the exercise of my calling – yes, calling, which is the highest duty – you would not care to take me by the hand!

DAUGHTER. Why not?

POET. I had a father whose hopes were centred in me, as an onlyson who would carry on his affairs. . . . I ran away from the Commercial College. . . . My father worried himself to death. . . . My mother wanted me to be religious . . . I couldn't be that . . . she disowned me. . . . I had a friend who helped me through the hard times. . . . That friend behaved like a tyrant to those for whom I spoke and sang. I had to strike down my friend and benefactor in order to save my soul! Since then I have had no peace; men call me dishonourable, the seum of the earth. What help is it that my conscience tells me, 'You have done right,' when the next moment it says, 'You have done wrong'? Such is life!

*

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

DAUGHTER. Come with me into the wilderness!

LAWYER. Your child!

DAUGHTER (*pointing to all present*). These are my children! Individually they are good, but they have only to get together to quarrel and turn into demons. . . . Farewell!

*

(Outside the castle. The same scenery as in Act I, Scene I. But the ground beneath the castle walls is now covered with flowers (blue monkshood, aconite). On the roof of the castle, at the very top of the lantern, is seen a chrysanthemum bud on the point of opening. The castle windows are illuminated with wax candles.)

The DAUGHTER and the POET.

*

DAUGHTER. The hour is at hand when, by the aid of fire, I shall ascend into the ether again . . . It is what you mortals call death – the death that you approach in fear.

POET. Fear of the unknown.

DAUGHTER. Which you know.

POET. Who knows it?

DAUGHTER. All men! Why do you not believe your prophets?

POET. Prophets have never been believed; why is that? And 'If God hath spoken, why then do men not believe?' His convincing might should be irresistible!

DAUGHTER. Have you always doubted?

POET. No! Often I have had the certainty; but after a time it passed away, like a dream when one awakes!

A DREAM PLAY

DAUGHTER. It is not easy — being a mortal!

POET. You understand and admit that? . . .

DAUGHTER. Yes!

POET. Tell me: was it not Indra who once sent his son down to Earth to hear the complaints of mankind?

DAUGHTER. Yes: and how was he received?

POET. How did he fulfil his mission? — to answer with a question.

DAUGHTER. To answer with another . . . Was not the state of mankind better after his visit to Earth? Answer truthfully!

POET. Better? . . . Yes, a little! a very little! . . . But instead of asking questions, will you tell me the riddle?

DAUGHTER. Yes, but what good will it be — since you won't believe me?

POET. I shall believe *you*, for I know who you are!

DAUGHTER. Well then, I will tell you! In the dawn of time, before the sun shone, Brahma, the divine primeval force, let himself be enticed by Maya, mother of the world, to propagate himself. This mingling of the divine element with the earthly was Heaven's Fall. The world, life, and humanity are thus but a phantom, a semblance, a dream-image . . .

POET. My dream!

DAUGHTER. A dream come true! But in order to get free of the earthly element, Brahma's descendants seek privation and suffering. . . . Here you have suffering as the liberator. . . . But this yearning for suffering comes into conflict with the craving for enjoyment,

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

which is love . . . and now you understand what love is, with its highest joys merged in the greatest sufferings, the sweetest in the bitterest! Do you understand now what woman is? Woman, through whom sin and death entered into life?

POET. I understand! . . . And the end? . . .

DAUGHTER. That you know . . . The conflict between the pain of enjoyment and the enjoyment of suffering . . . the pangs of the penitent and the pleasures of the sensualist . . .

POET. Conflict then?

DAUGHTER. Conflict between opposites gives birth to power, just as fire and water give steam-power. . . .

POET. But peace? rest?

DAUGHTER. Hush! you must ask no more, and I must not answer! . . . The altar is already adorned for the sacrifice . . . the flowers are keeping watch; the lights are kindled . . . white sheets before the windows . . . fir twigs in the porch. . . .

POET. You speak as calmly as though suffering did not exist for you!

DAUGHTER. Not exist? . . . I have suffered all your sufferings; but a hundredfold, since my perceptions were finer. . . .

POET. Tell me your sorrows!

DAUGHTER. Poet, could you tell me yours without a single discordant word? Could your speech ever approach your thought?

POET. No, you are right! In my own eyes I was deaf and dumb, and while the multitude listened in admiration to my song, to me it seemed mere bawling . . .

A DREAM PLAY

thus when men paid me homage I was always ashamed!

DAUGHTER. And yet you wish me . . . ? Look me in the eyes!

POET. I cannot endure your glance. . . .

DAUGHTER. How then will you endure my speech if I talk my own language? . . .

POET. But tell me before you go: what have you suffered most from, down here?

DAUGHTER. From — being alive; from feeling my vision weakened by having eyes, my hearing dulled by having ears; my bright and airy thought bound in labyrinthine coils of fat. You have seen a brain . . . what crooked, crawling channels . . .

POET. Yes, and that's why all right-thinking men think crookedly!

DAUGHTER. Spiteful, always spiteful! But that you all are! . . .

POET. How can one be otherwise?

DAUGHTER. And now, first of all, I will shake the dust off my feet . . . the earth, the clay . . . (*Takes off her shoes and puts them in the fire.*)

*

PORTRESS (*comes in and puts her shawl in the fire.*) Perhaps I may burn my shawl too? (*Goes out.*)

OFFICER (*comes in*). And I my roses, of which only the thorns remain! (*Goes out.*)

BILLSTICKER (*comes in*). The bills can go, but the dip-net, never! (*Goes out.*)

GLAZIER (*comes in*). The diamond that opened the door! farewell! (*Goes out.*)

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

LAWYER (*comes in*). The report of the great suit touching the Pope's beard, or the diminishing water-supply in the sources of the Ganges. (*Goes out.*)

QUARANTINE OFFICER (*comes in*). A small contribution consisting of the black mask which turned me into a blackamoor against my will! (*Goes out.*)

VICTORIA (*comes in*). My beauty, my sorrow! (*Goes out.*)

EDITH (*comes in*). My ugliness, my sorrow! (*Goes out.*)

BLIND MAN (*comes in and puts his hand in the fire*). I give my hand for my eye! (*Goes out.*)

(DON JUAN *comes in in the Bath-chair*. SHE and the FRIEND.)

DON JUAN. Hurry, hurry! Life is short! (*Goes out with the others.*)

*

POET. I have read that when life is nearing its end, everything and everybody throng past in a single stream . . . Is this the end?

DAUGHTER. Yes, it is mine! Farewell!

POET. Say one parting word!

DAUGHTER. No, I cannot! Do you think that your language could express our thoughts?

*

THE THEOLOGIAN (*comes in furiously*). I am disavowed by God, I am persecuted by men, abandoned by the Government and scorned by my colleagues! How shall I have faith when none else has . . . How defend a God who does not defend his own? It's bosh! (*Throws a book on the fire and goes out.*)

*

A DREAM PLAY

POET (*snatching the book from the fire*). Do you know what that was? . . . A Book of Martyrs: a calendar, with a martyr for every day of the year.

DAUGHTER. A martyr?

POET. Yes, one who was tortured and put to death for his faith! Tell me why! Do you believe that all who are tortured suffer? that all who are put to death feel pain? Surely suffering is redemption, and death liberation.

*

KRISTIN (*with her strips of paper*). I paste, I paste, till there's nothing left to paste. . . .

POET. And if the very heavens cracked you'd try to paste them up . . . Go!

KRISTIN. Aren't there any double windows in the castle there?

POET. No, no — not there!

KRISTIN (*going out*). Well, I'll go then!

*

DAUGHTER. Our parting hour has come — the end draws nigh.

Dreamer, farewell! farewell, thou mortal child,
Thou bard who knowest best the way of life!
Thou hoverest on light wings above the earth,
Stooping at times to touch the clay beneath,
To graze its surface, not to cling to it! —
Now that I go . . . even in this parting hour
Of separation from a friend, a place,
How poignantly the loss of all we loved,
And penitence for sin, rises anew . . .
Have I not learned the anguish of all being —

EASTER AND OTHER PLAYS

Learned what it is to be a mortal man? . . .
One misses even what one never prized,
Repenting deeds that one has never wrought . . .
Fain would we hence, and yet we long to stay . . .
So is the heart riven in twain, our feelings,
As between pulling horses, torn asunder
By contradiction, discord, irresolve . . .
Farewell!
Say to thy brethren that I think of them
There, where I go: and carry in thy name
Their lamentations to the throne of God.
Farewell!

(She goes into the castle. Music is heard. The background is lit up by the burning castle, and now shows a wall of human faces, questioning, sorrowing, despairing. . . . While the castle is burning, the flower-bud on the roof blossoms forth into a giant chrysanthemum.)